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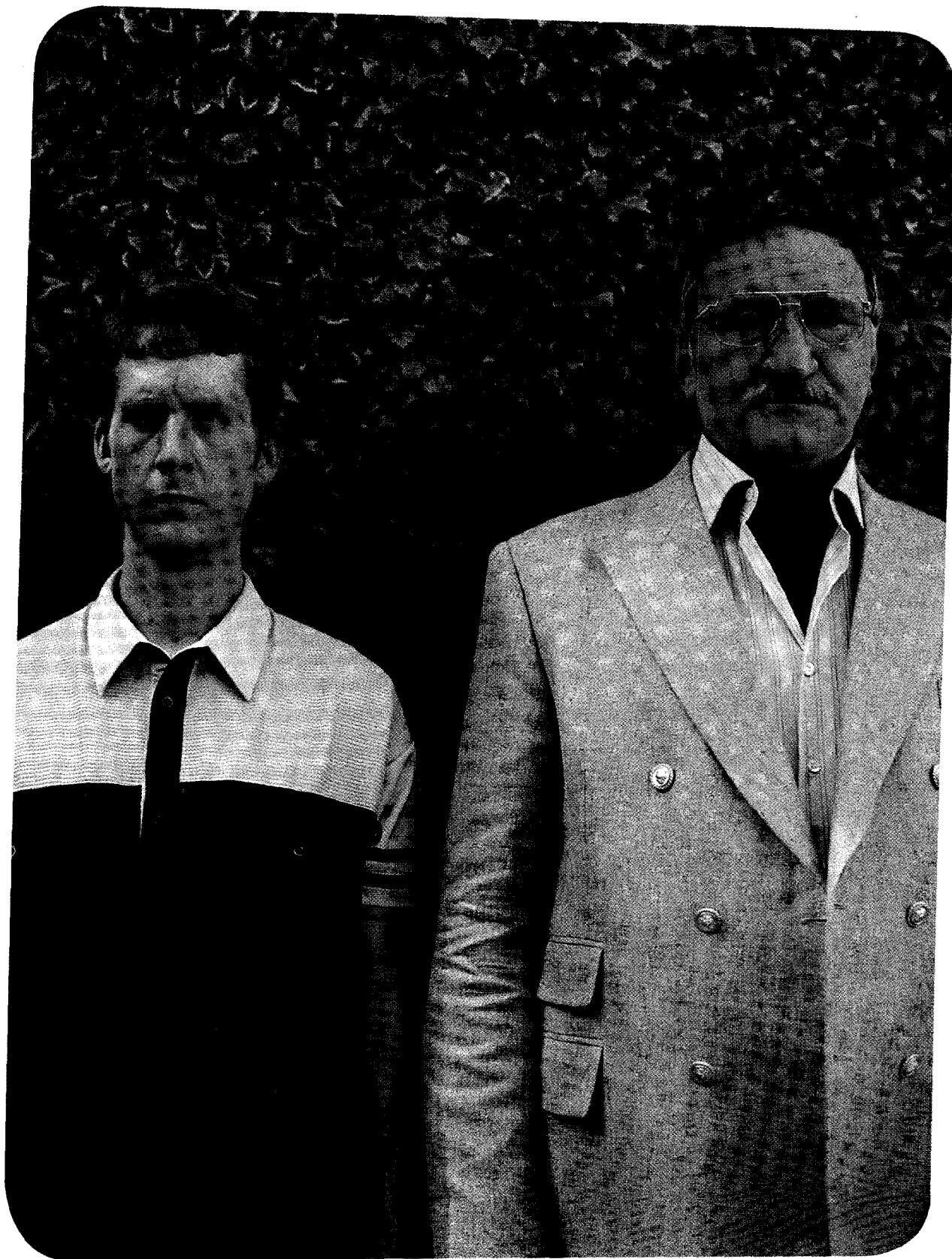
OCT. 30, 2006

NEW YORKER



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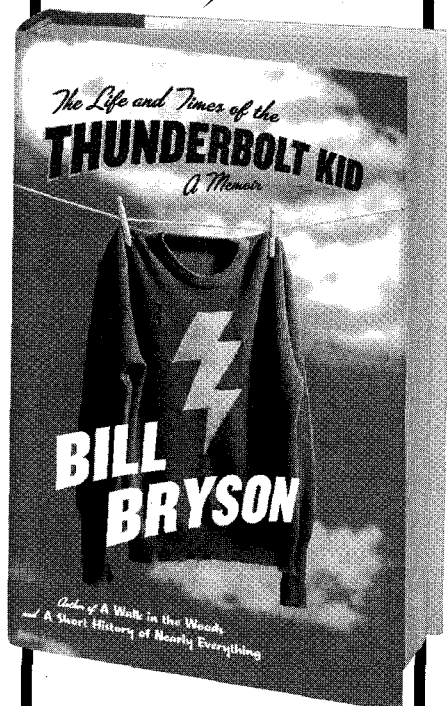


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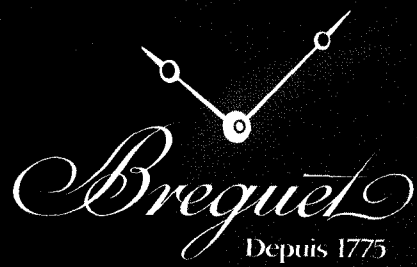
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Peter J. Boyer ("Southern Discomfort," p. 42), a staff writer, is working on a book about Pentecostalism.

Ian Frazier ("Snook," p. 54) is the author of "The Fish's Eye," a collection of essays about fishing and the outdoors.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 40) writes a regular column about business and finance for the magazine. His book "The Wisdom of Crowds" is available in paperback.

Jack Handey (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 52) has published several humor books, including "Deep Thoughts."

Marisa Acocella Marchetto (Cartoon, p. 66) recently published "Cancer Vixen," a memoir.

Galway Kinnell (Poem, p. 68) received a Pulitzer Prize for "Selected Poems." His new book of poems, "Strong Is Your Hold," comes out next month.

Connie Bruck ("Millions for Millions," p. 62), a longtime staff writer, has published three books, including "The Predator's Ball" and "When Hollywood Had a King."

Hilton Als ("The Show-Woman," p. 74) is a staff writer and theatre critic. He is the author of "The Women."

Daniel Alarcón (Fiction, p. 82) published "War by Candlelight," a collection of short stories, last year. His first novel, "Lost City Radio," is due out in February.

Keith Gessen (A Critic at Large, p. 91) is a founding editor of the magazine *n+1*. His translation of Svetlana Alexievich's "Voices from Chernobyl" won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction last year.

Tad Friend (On Television, p. 100) is the author of "Lost in Mongolia: Travels in Hollywood and Other Foreign Lands." ♦



"I'm North Korea. He's Iran."

THE MAIL

REASONABLE DOUBT

In his otherwise fair discussion of the film that Sut Jhally and I co-wrote and co-directed, "Hijacking Catastrophe," Nicholas Lemann critiques the "imprecision" with which we advance "two not completely congruent theories of the war" in Iraq ("Paranoid Style," October 16th). The problem is that one of the two theories that Lemann assigns to us is not actually present in the film. While we do make the case that neoconservatives saw September 11th as an opportunity to enact long-standing plans to remake the Middle East, the film never asserts, or implies, the second theory, that "big corporations—especially oil companies—wanted war, and used their friends in government to get it." Citing their own words, we merely argue that many neo-conservatives have long pushed for securing and controlling oil flows in places like Iraq to gain leverage over emerging global rivals. The desires of "oilmen" have nothing to do with this analysis and are therefore never mentioned in the film. Indeed, our interviewees state that "oil is not enough to explain a war on Iraq" and that "the major reason to take Iraq was a display of imperial power: to show both the Arab world . . . Europe, and the Far Eastern bloc, China and the Koreans, who was master."

*Jeremy Earp
Media Education Foundation
Northampton, Mass.*

I agree with Lemann that "tragedy is more profound if it is permitted to entail not just malignancy but also people screwing up." Unfortunately, he conflates conspiracy theories about the United States government's being "behind" the September 11th attacks with movies that discuss the Bush Administration's use of the resulting climate of fear to pursue preëxisting interests. Lemann asks, for example, at what moment President Bush "signs on" to the agenda of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC); this is, of course, unknowable. But we do know that the President's top advisers—including Richard Perle, Don-

ald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz—were in favor of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's government as early as 1998, when they stated their position in a letter from PNAC to President Clinton. This doesn't make them all-knowing or all-powerful—the results of the war in Iraq make that perfectly clear. But it does suggest, along with other available evidence, that they may have exploited a moment of national tragedy to promote a war for which they would not otherwise have been able to muster support.

*William D. Hartung
President's Fellow, World Policy
Institute
New York City*

FROM SEA TO CELLULOID

Until I read Ben Bradlee's excellent history of the U.S.S. Philip—on which I served as a radioman, from 1966 through 1968—I knew nothing of the heroic part that it had played in the South Pacific ("A Return," October 2nd). The Philip I knew was a rusted-out tin can, a weary old warhorse. Earlier, in 1965, the Philip co-starred with John Wayne in the film "In Harm's Way," in which it portrayed the U.S.S. Cassidy as it escaped from Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7th. When I first came aboard the Philip, it was docked in Pearl Harbor in order to have the retrofit materials used for an authentic Second World War appearance removed. The Philip was decommissioned in 1968, and, as Bradlee recounted, it sank in 1972 while being towed to a scrap yard. In the interim, however, the ship got one last shot at Hollywood, as a prop in the 1970 picture "Tora! Tora! Tora!" That seemed a fitting end to its glorious and useful career.

*David Williams
Santa Barbara, Calif.*

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE WEDDING BELLES

Paul Rudnick, a playwright, screenwriter, and occasional contributor to this magazine, has a new comedy, "Regrets Only," which stars Christine Baranski as a Park Avenue doyenne whose daughter is getting married and Jackie Hoffman as her sassy maid. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE EASTERN SOUNDS

The Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko, a vital presence on the European jazz scene since the early

sixties, first played the U.S. four years ago. He's been back a few times since then, but infrequently enough that an appearance is still an event. Known as a discerning improviser capable of subtle tonal shadings, he is at Birdland this week with a tight quartet. (See page 12.)

ART TAKING SHAPE

The Museum of Modern Art's eagerly anticipated retrospective of the work of the American abstract painter Brice Marden opens this week. Collectively, Marden's paintings provide a master

class in purity of form and color, from the waxed monochromes that made his reputation to his more recent calligraphic squiggles. (See page 12.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC REMEMBERING WAR

New York will never get enough of St. Petersburg's Kirov Orchestra and its charismatic maestro, Valery Gergiev. The final concert in their centennial tribute to Dmitri Shostakovich features the composer's Eighth and Thirteenth Symphonies, each a shattering testimony to the horrors of the Second World War. (See page 20.)

MOVIES THE EYE IN HUNGARY

Despite Soviet oppression, the Hungarian cinema reawakened in the nineteen-sixties, and produced its great director, Miklós Jancsó, whose formalistic historical dramas concealed allegories of revolt. Jancsó, who is eighty-five, is still filming, and brilliantly; as part of its series of Hungarian films since 1956, the Walter Reade Theatre is offering a mini-retrospective of his work. (See page 26.)

An audience-participation screening of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" at IFC Center. Photograph by Gus Powell.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK ROCKING OUT

Current trends in rock, like the theatrical emo of Fall Out Boy and Panic! At the Disco, are irrelevant to the singer Josh Todd and his oddly classicist band,



Buckcherry. Buckcherry operate in the stolidly male tradition of Aerosmith and AC/DC; no capes or vertical hair or romantic hand-wringing for them. Buckcherry play hard guitar rock, more complex than the blues but never truly complex, with singing that requires notes to be hit, accurately, while screaming. Sinewy, often shirtless, and generously tattooed, Todd behaves as if the trinity of sex, drugs, and rock and roll needed neither parsing nor amendment. Anyone nostalgic for the lean, propulsive Guns N' Roses of 1987 should go see Buckcherry when they play Webster Hall on October 26. Their 2001 album, "Time Bomb," is a merciless and forceful example of the genre, and it hasn't been bettered. The band's new album, "Fifteen," errs on the side of the obvious—the chorus of the current single "Crazy Bitch" is "Hey, you're a crazy bitch, but you fuck so good I'm on top of it"—but that won't hamper the band live.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BHUTAN

Daisy Foote's drama portrays a New England family in the days following the death of its patriarch. In previews. Opens Oct. 29. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

BUTLEY

Nathan Lane stars as a literature professor with a personal crisis, in Simon Gray's dark comedy from 1972. Nicholas Martin directs. Opens Oct. 25. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CLEAN HOUSE

A new play by Sarah Ruhl, about a doctor (Blair Brown) whose housekeeper (Vanessa Aspillaga) prefers telling jokes to cleaning the apartment. With Jill Clayburgh. In previews. Opens Oct. 30. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA,

PART ONE: VOYAGE

The first of three plays by Tom Stoppard about a group of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals, starring Ethan Hawke, Brian F. O'Byrne, Billy Crudup, Jennifer Ehle, Josh Hamilton, Martha Plimpton, and Amy Irving. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

COMPANY

John Doyle ("Sweeney Todd") directs the Stephen Sondheim and George Furth Tony Award-winning musical from 1970, in which a bachelor observes the lives of five married couples. Previews begin Oct. 30. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS!—THE MUSICAL

A musical-theatre version of the children's story. With book and lyrics by Timothy Mason. Directed by Matt August. In previews. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

EVIL DEAD THE MUSICAL

Hinton Battle and Christopher Bond direct this campy musical adaptation of Sam Raimi's horror-film franchise. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

GREY GARDENS

Christine Ebersole and Mary Louise Wilson star in Doug Wright's musical based on the 1975 Maysles-brothers documentary about Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Little Edie, the reclusive aunt and cousin of Jackie Kennedy. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE INTERNATIONALIST

Anne Washburn wrote this play about an American businessman working in a country where he does not speak the language. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED

The Off Broadway hit play by Douglas Carter Beane, about a closeted movie star and his overzealous agent, gets transferred to Broadway. Starring Julie White, Tom Everett Scott, and Johnny Galecki. Scott Ellis directs. Previews begin Oct. 26. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARY POPPINS

The smash hit from London's West End comes to Broadway. Starring Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins and Gavin Lee as Bert; Richard Eyre directs. In previews. (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747.)

MIMI LE DUCK

Eartha Kitt is featured in a new musical, in which a Mormon housewife from Idaho leaves her successful QVC duck-painting business for Paris. In previews. Opens Oct. 31. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

LES MISÉRABLES

A new production of the musical based on Victor Hugo's epic, set in nineteenth-century France. John Caird directs. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

POST MORTEM

The Flea presents the world premiere of a new comedy by A. R. Gurney, set at a faith-based university in the future. Jim Simpson directs. In previews. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

REGRETS ONLY

Manhattan Theatre Club presents the world premiere of a new comedy of manners by Paul Rudnick, about the social mores of a set of wealthy Manhattanites. Starring Christine Baranski and George Grizzard. In previews. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

Blythe Danner stars in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Tennessee Williams's psychological drama, about an aging widow trying to protect the reputation of her dead son. Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE SUNSET LIMITED

The Steppenwolf Theatre's production of a new play by Cormac McCarthy, in which a convicted murderer saves the life of a Manhattan intellectual. In previews. Opens Oct. 29. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Twyla Tharp conceived, directed, and choreographed this jukebox musical set to the music of Bob Dylan. In previews. Opens Oct. 26. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

WAITING FOR GODOT

The Gate Theatre of Dublin's production of Samuel Beckett's masterpiece comes to the Skirball Center. Oct. 24-28. (566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200.)

THE WILD DUCK

A National Theatre of Norway production of Henrik Ibsen's masterwork, adapted by Eirik Stubo. In Norwegian, with English supertitles. Oct. 25-29. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

NOW PLAYING

BLUE DOOR

Tanya Barfield's drama begins with the uptight mathematics professor Lewis (Reg E. Cathey) confessing that his wife has just requested a divorce because he refused to attend the Million Man March; she accuses him of denying his own history. As if to prove her point, Lewis's history comes calling, in the form of four generations of ancestors (all played by the resourceful André Holland) who suffer from terrors including lynching, slavery, and the Klan. While the play's early scenes have a starchy, textbook quality, there is a growing momentum to "Blue Door"'s late sequences; under the helm of the director Leigh Silverman, it takes its time but ultimately finds its way home. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 29.)

EMERGENCE—SEE!

Daniel Beaty portrays forty characters in his new one-man play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

HEARTBREAK HOUSE

In George Bernard Shaw's play from 1920 (now in a Roundabout Theatre production, under the direction of Robin Lefevre), life in Captain Shotover's bohemian Edwardian household is supposed to be a comedy of bad manners. Shaw's characters are puppets for his ideas; language pours out of them, but the point blurs. Although Philip Bosco, as Shotover, Swoosie Kurtz and Byron Jennings as his daughter and son-in-law, and especially Lily Rabe, as the visitor, Ellie Dunn, turn in lively performances, the comedy sinks under the weight of its own exposition. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/23/06.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

HELL HOUSE

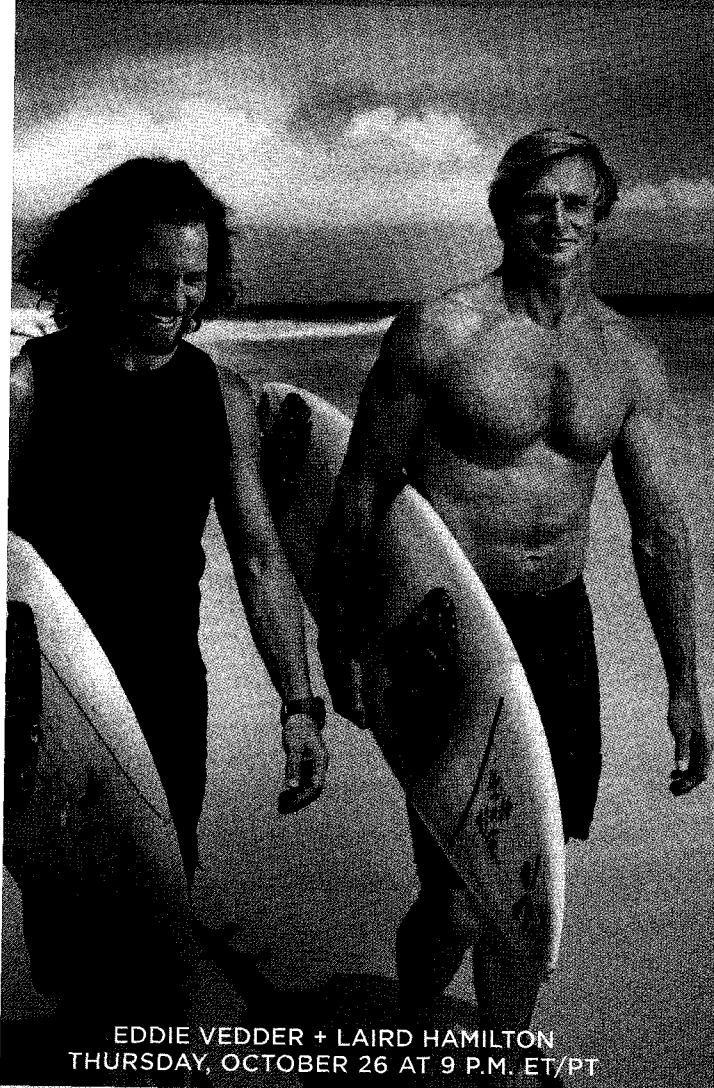
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of harrowing scenes—a cheerleader has a gory abortion; two men marry each other, after which one suffers from AIDS (the doctor wears a yarmulke)—before reaching hell, and then heaven, where they have the opportunity to be saved. The company plays it straight, save for a few sly winks to New York spectators (irony is a sin comparable to murder, apparently), and the adherence to sincerity works just as well for this production as it does for the Christians who use these scare tactics to try to shape impressionable young minds. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through Oct. 29.)

LOSING LOUIE

This daffy comedy, which never rises to the level of farce, concerns two generations of the Ellis family, who wander in and out of the same bedroom in synopacted sequences that take place across a forty-year divide. First we meet the womanizing Louie (Scott Cohen), a young dad who's cheating on his harebrained wife, Bobbie (Rebecca Creskoff), with a slim brunette law student (Jama Williamson). In subsequent scenes, we encounter the progeny: two antagonistic brothers reunited for Louie's funeral. It turns out that Pop's grave site is submerged under several feet of water, and all the mourners come away with muddy feet. It's an apt symbol for a play that's more damp than dry. Jerry Zaks directs. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

MY NAME IS RACHEL CORRIE

The American premiere of a play created from the diaries and letters of the American activist. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 212-307-4100.)

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE

The beguiling antiheroine of Jay Presson Allen's adaptation of the novel by Muriel Spark is an Edinburgh schoolteacher with a devoted—that is, emotionally indentured—clique of impressionable female students. Miss Brodie is at once a spinster, a sensualist, an educational reformer, a would-be Fascist, a misguided aesthete, a fool, a narcissist, and a pimp. In the New Group's undernourished revival, directed by Scott Elliott, Brodie's mystique rests awkwardly in the person of Cynthia Nixon, who seems uncertain of her accent and adrift in her role. Without a solid Jean Brodie, Elliott lets the rest of the play go slack, leaving the capable cast to stumble through the script's ambiguous turns. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A SMALL, MELODRAMATIC STORY

Labyrinth Theatre Company presents a play by Stephen Belber, about a woman who falls for a cop with a past. Directed by Lucie Tiberghien. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

WRECKS

The topography and the black-and-white design in Neil LaBute's superb and subversive monologue (directed by the playwright) cunningly suggest the psychic division in the gaunt, chain-smoking widower Edward Carr (the compelling Ed Harris). Carr stands before us, taking drags on a cigarette and waving away the smoke screen before he speaks—a semaphore that, like everything else here, is emblematic of the self-destructiveness to come. The play is about self-deception; Carr renders himself psychologically blind by cutting himself off from his feelings. LaBute's play is not a glib exercise in negativity but a masterly attempt to shed light on the ways in which we manufacture our own darkness. (10/23/06) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Also Playing

ARMS AND THE MAN: Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-

307-4100. **KING LEAR:** H.S.A., 647 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444. **MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **NIXON'S NIXON:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 28. **NO CHILD...:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 25: The deep-voiced reggae star **Buju Banton** started off performing rough-edged dancehall music with remarkable success; in 1992, he topped Bob Marley's record for the most No. 1 singles in one year on the Jamaican charts. Shortly thereafter, two of his friends were murdered, and Banton converted to Rastafarianism. He quickly expanded his music to incorporate a positive roots-reggae message, al-

tening of this mammoth new multidisciplinary club situated in a former garage in the old Domino's sugar refinery continues with appearances by the **Sun Ra Arkestra**, under the direction of the saxophonist Marshall Allen, and by the guitarist **Gary Lucas**, who will perform both solo (to projections of horror, science-fiction, and erotic film clips) and with his trio **Gods and Monsters**.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM

Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 31: **Medeski Martin & Wood** have shown many sides in their career. At times they've experimented with Grateful Dead space-set passages, and at other points they've played straight-ahead piano jazz. Their Halloween shows tend toward the experimental. The powerhouse soul singer and former corrections officer **Sharon Jones** and her band, the **Dap Kings**, will whip the crowd into shape.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—The ashes of the screaming Texan hardcore outfit **At the Drive-In** are fertile ground indeed. The band's vocalist, **Cedric Bixler**, and guitarist, **Omar Rodriguez**, formed the concept-heavy progressive-punk outfit **Mars Volta**. The remaining members put together **Sparta** (here Oct. 25). It leaves the rampant experimentalism to its former comrades and focusses on hook-laden rock that jettisons needless filigree in favor of a short, sharp shock.



TABLES FOR TWO CAFÉ D'ALSACE

1695 Second Ave., at 88th St. (212-722-5133)—Simon Oren, the owner of **Nice Matin** and **Marseille**, is the Dave Thomas of the New York bistro revival: not the originator (Keith McNally would be our Ray Kroc) but a distinguished and thriving practitioner all the same. The Upper East Side got a branch last spring. By night, **Café d'Alsace** is a clamorous brasserie, the unsightly acoustic tile on the ceiling doing little to muffle the treble din; by day, the atmosphere is dawdling and subdued. It's not as cozy as **Café Luxembourg** or as grandiose as **Balthazar**, but, in such close proximity to the likes of **Elaine's** and **Pat O'Brien's**, it fills the Francophile slot authentically enough to summon thoughts, if not visions, of the **Maginot Line**.

Although the place ably serves up the standards, steak frites and the rest, the innovation, for Yorkville anyway, is the array of heartier Alsatian offerings, many of which arrive in black cast-iron pots, like something a farm girl might sneak to a wounded soldier hiding out in the barn. (You also get **Rambo-sized steak knives**, in case the enemy stumbles in.) The *baeckeofe*, a traditional Alsatian lamb-and-oxtail

casserole, is more than fortifying, especially if you've started out with a sausage plate or a preliminary hunk of bone marrow, which comes with toasted country bread and a bowl of salt. The lamb shanks, braised in beer, may cleave delicately off their bones, but they will likely stick to yours. (The spaetzle is the spackle.) Even the fish has left: the resemblance, in texture and color, of the creamy pike mousse to gefilte fish does not detract from its heartwarming (and heart-stopping) savoriness.

Much has been made of the fact that **Café d'Alsace** has a beer sommelier. The place has more than a hundred and ten varieties, and even the most expensive ones won't hit the bottom line as hard as a **Châteauneuf du Pape**. There's a **Chimay Bleu**, **Grand Reserve**, at about a buck an ounce. The waitress holds the label out for all to see, pops the cork, pours out a taste, then waits for the verdict. You may linger a moment, savoring the chance to send back a beer. "It has never happened," the waitress says, and why would it? (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées \$15.75-\$25.75.)

—Nick Paumgarten

though his latest release, "Too Bad," is a return to the aggressive dancehall sound of his youth. His career surpassed Marley's at home, but it will never have the same international reach. An early song, "Boom Bye Bye," from 1992, called for violence against gays (including shooting them in the head). His subsequent recordings have shied away from such notions, but Banton is unrepentant, and his shows are often protested by gay-rights activists (and a few have recently been cancelled as a result). Oct. 27: For many, the gruff vocals and funky rolling piano lines of **Dr. John** are the epitome of New Orleans music. He's a national treasure.

BROOKLYN SUGAR

289 Kent Ave., at S. 2nd St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-670-3710)—Oct. 28: The Chris-

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Oct. 27: Sweden's **Love Is All** revels in artsy party music. The energetic five-piece band cuts through the saccharine pop native to its home country with a jangly horn-heavy racket.

MARION'S MARQUEE LOUNGE

356 Bowery, between E. 4th St. and Great Jones St. (212-475-7621)—Oct. 30: "Infinite Mondays with **Tony Scherr**," a new series at this cozy offshoot of Marion's Continental featuring the Brooklyn-based singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer, draws an insidery crowd (Norah Jones and Jesse Harris, both of whom have collaborated with Scherr, were recently in the au-

dience). The next three Mondays feature a tight trio led by Scherr on vocals and slide guitar, playing anything that pops into his head, from a bossa-nova version of Cheap Trick's "I Want You to Want Me" to original songs from his forthcoming album.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE

Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 31: The Los Angeles Latino rap trio Cypress Hill, known for their hearty endorsement of marijuana, became one of the more influential hip-hop acts of the nineties and then went on to bridge the gap between rap and rock audiences.

S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Oct. 25-26: The English neo-soul duo Floetry. Oct. 27: The Spanish Harlem Orchestra serves up smokin' salsa.

THEATRE AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 24-25: The Killers, from Las Vegas, had a runaway success with their flashy neo-New Wave debut album, "Hot Fuss," two years ago. They're back with another record, "Sam's Town," and a stylistic about-face: out with the eighties glam, in with a stadium-rocking Springsteen sound.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Amos Lee, a schoolteacher turned folksinger, takes a soulful approach to the genre. He's here on Oct. 24 with songs from his sophomore release, "Supply and Demand." The singer Mindy Smith, a native of nearby Smithtown whose heart belongs to Nashville (she now lives there, too), opens the show. Her second album, "Long Island Shores," came out earlier this month.

WARSAW

261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Oct. 27: England's Futureheads surfaced two years ago at the height of the neo-post-punk resurgence, reviving—alongside peers like Bloc Party and Franz Ferdinand—the compellingly disjointed guitar-based rock of such early-eighties bands as XTC, Public Image Ltd., and Gang of Four. Their second album, "News and Tributes," which was released this summer, finds the band moving beyond their immediate touchstones and coming into their own style.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Oct. 26: Buckcherry. Far and away the most unlikely comeback story in years, L.A.'s tattooed bad boys seemed destined to be one-hit wonders after they made a fleeting splash with "Lit Up" (an unapologetic ode to cocaine), in the late nineties. Apparently, the appetite for a cross between Guns N' Roses and vintage AC/DC runs on a seven-year cycle: this summer, "Crazy Bitch" (a raucous and irreverent single about sex) stormed the charts.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Starting Oct. 24: Paula West, a quality singer whose jazz credentials are confirmed each time she swings a number. She has a winning combination of Nancy Wilson-like élan and mountain-spring diction; all she needs now is a major-label recording contract.

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 25-28: On "Lontano," his current album with his

young trio, the Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko continues his recent winning streak for ECM records.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 26-27: The pianist Cecil Taylor, who is in his seventies, still sounds as gloriously disruptive as he did back in the late fifties, when he helped rewrite the rules of jazz. The only musical map he follows remains the one he drew up himself. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator Les Paul. The Mingus Big Band takes over on Tuesdays.



Jamaica's Buju Banton, at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Oct. 27-28: "Fusion Revolution." And so the barriers come down. With the appearance of the Joe Zawinul Syndicate within the hallowed confines of Jazz at Lincoln Center, fusion enters the pantheon.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 25-29: Of the generation of new-jazz players that sprung up in the eighties, few squared avant-garde tendencies with traditional values the way Bennie Wallace did. Here the brawny-toned tenor saxophonist takes the helm of a large ensemble to pay tribute to the patriarch of the instrument, Coleman Hawkins.

TONIC

107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Oct. 29: The music of Kamikaze Ground Crew, a seven-piece horn ensemble led by Gina Leishman and Doug Wieselmann, both accomplished multi-instrumentalists and composers, is equally at home on a midway, in a jazz club, or on the Great White Way. Don't be put off by the group's name; "kamikaze" actually means "divine wind," and for this crew it couldn't be more appropriate.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Oct. 25: Madeline Peyroux. A decade ago, Peyroux's first

album, "Dreamland," grabbed critics and casual listeners alike with its blend of Billie Holiday-esque sass and country-and-Western spunk. It took her eight years to come up with a second release, "Careless Love," which offered a combination of offbeat standards, Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen covers, and originals. Her new album, "Half the Perfect World," continues in the same welcome direction.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 24-29: The Michael Weiss quintet. How does a journeyman player transcend his rank? Answers will be found when pianist Weiss, a trusted sideman for the likes of Johnny Griffith and others, leads his own hard-swinging quintet. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"Americans in Paris, 1860-1900" presents some hundred paintings by Whistler, Cassatt, Sargent, Eakins, and others who travelled from the U.S. to find inspiration in what was then the art capital of the world. Opens Oct. 24. ♦ "Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art of the Papuan Gulf." Opens Oct. 24. ♦ "Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde." The Parisian gallerist Vollard (1866-1939) was an early champion of Matisse, Bonnard, van Gogh, and many others; this unusually canted show comprises samples of the work that they made with his encouragement and patronage. The two giants of the show's title are represented with canvases from solo shows that Vollard mounted in 1895 and 1901, respectively. Through Jan. 7. ♦ "New Orleans After the Flood: Photographs by Robert Polidori." Through Dec. 10. ♦ "Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument." Through Oct. 29. ♦ "Sean Scully: Wall of Light." Through Jan. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings." Opens Oct. 29. ♦ "Eija-Liisa Ahtila: The Wind." The Finnish artist presents a video installation in which a woman's apartment is disrupted by gales. Opens Oct. 25. ♦ "Projects 83: Monika Sosnowska." Sosnowska has torn a jagged gash between the museum's second and third levels for viewers to peer through, up into a white-walled space; the floor below is littered with plastic shards. As an art work, "The Hole" is more a one-liner than a revolutionary gesture, but it's still fun to see Yoshio Taniguchi's precious über-modern temple punctured, just a tiny bit, for the sake of art. Through Nov. 27. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Two bodies of work by the Italian artist (1899-1968) best known for his slashed canvases are presented in "Lucio Fontana: Venice/New York." Through Jan. 21. ♦ "Zaha Hadid." Through Oct. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—"Picasso and American Art." Through Jan. 28. ♦

What's the difference between a Mac and a PC?

Where do we begin? PCs are for the stuff we have to do, like pie charts and spreadsheets. Macs are for the stuff we want to do, like photos, music and movies. On a PC, viruses and crashing are "normal." On a Mac, everything just works the way it should. And unlike PCs, a Mac comes ready to do all the things you want, the day you bring it home. Sound like differences you could get used to? Read on.

Mark Grotjahn's large-scale works in pencil toy with geometry and multiple vanishing points; he ventures into color with a pair of drawings in saturated reds and yellows that anchor the room. Through Jan. 7. ♦ Works by Edward Hopper fill the fifth floor, including his iconic "Nighthawks," on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago. Through Dec. 3. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

ASIA SOCIETY

Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—The objects in "Gilded Splendor: Treasures of China's Liao Empire (907-1125)," from recently excavated tombs in Mongolia, have spurred a scholarly reassessment of the Liao empire. For laypersons, they provide a startling view into a society in transition from nomadic to stationary. A wooden sarcophagus and its contents—bronze burial masks and silver mesh burial suits—reveal detailed information about the Liao's religion and cultural practices. Other objects, like an extraordinary hairpin in the shape of a phoenix, ceramics, gilded silver vessels, and miniature pagodas, prove that the wealth and craftsmanship of the Liao didn't lag, as previously thought, behind the preceding Tang dynasty (618-907) or the simultaneous Song dynasty (960-1279). Through Dec. 31. ♦ "One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now." Through Dec. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"Bob Dylan's American Journey: 1956-1966." There's not much common ground between Bob Dylan and J. Pierpont Morgan, the robber baron whose art collection runs more toward Old Masters and illuminated manuscripts than guitar picks and protest pamphlets. However, a surprisingly extensive collection of Dylan artifacts, including typescripts of lyrics and recordings, has made its way into the Morgan's collection. The first unveiling includes odd entries like a T-shirt Woody Guthrie wore while committed to the Greystone State Hospital and an inane inscription penned by Dylan (still Bobby Zimmerman) in a classmate's high-school yearbook. Films, listening booths, and lyric sheets, as well as a de Kooning-esque "Painting of a Woman," provide a more interesting portrait of the artist in the decade before he O.D.ed on fame and, after a 1966 motorcycle accident, briefly dropped off the cultural map. Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER

44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—"Nancy Rubins: MOMA and Airplane Parts 1995 that visited Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain 2002/2003 then visited Forte Belvedere in 2003 and is now at SculptureCenter." Through Nov. 18. ♦ The latest in a proliferating subgenre of New York group shows protesting American imperial folly, "Denial Is a River" leans heavily on conceptual practices and activist precedents. There is a section devoted to Xeroxed agitprop (which visitors are free to take home for further contemplation), and a continuous screening of Godard's 1976 film, "Ici et Ailleurs," which started life in 1970 as a polemic made in cooperation with al Fatah, the Palestinian militant group. Douglas Boatwright contributes a video in which he dispiritedly repeats a stirring speech by the Black Panther Fred Hampton, and Melissa Dubbin and Aaron S. Davidson's reading-room installation is stocked with thirty-nine books recommended by the C.I.A. for students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. A tone of unmoored frustration pervades. Through Nov. 18. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

ABELARDO MORELL

Morell, whose photographs have often been concerned with illusion and the mystery inher-

ent in the everyday, is too restless (or, perhaps, too clever) to settle on a single style. His solid new show gathers work from four series, including pictures of opera scenery and money, photograms as gorgeous as they are tricky, and camera-obscura views of interiors turned topsy-turvy when the world outside appears upside-down on their walls. In the most spectacular of this latter series, a wall of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, stripped of everything but a de Chirico and some picture hooks, glows with the projected image of the museum's façade, all the more marvellous for being flipped on its head. Through Dec. 2. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

SARAH MORRIS

Gordon Bunshaft's Lever House seems to float on its slender first-floor columns, though a sense of menace attends the pedestrian in the courtyard who looks up to see the skyscraper levitating overhead. Morris takes advantage of this lowering lightness by installing a splintered geometric mural on the underside of the floating first story. The painting's jagged shapes in teal, orange, sky blue, and black reflect faintly in the polished stone pavement below and echo the surrounding grids of midtown curtain-wall. Why the piece is named for Robert Towne, screenwriter of "Chinatown" and "Shampoo," remains unclear, but it looks classy on Park Avenue. Through Dec. 3. (390 Park Ave. at 53rd St. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org.)

BETTINA RHEIMS

Rheims is best known for taking cheesecake up-market with big, glossy color photos that skirt sleaze to fix on something much more slippery: genuine eroticism. Forget the male gaze—Rheims might treat her subjects like sex objects, but the seductions she stages in borrowed bedrooms always feel reciprocated. This small but choice selection of photographs from the past twenty-five years includes portraits of Madonna, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Traci Lords, and Elizabeth Berkley as well as a group of frolicsome young women who steam up cheap Paris hotel rooms with a ripe, morning-after sensuality. Rheims doesn't stop at sexy; she goes deeper and heads straight for desire. Through Oct. 31. (Cook, 1063 Madison Ave., at 80th St. 212-737-3550.)

Short List

DAMIEN HIRST: Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Oct. 28. **WALKER EVANS:** UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave., at 51st St. 212-713-2885. Through Nov. 17. **ANISH KAPOOR:** Rockefeller Center, Fifth Ave. at 50th St. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org. Through Oct. 27. **GIORGIO MORANDI:** Thiebaud, 42 E. 76th St. 212-737-9759. Through Oct. 28. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22.

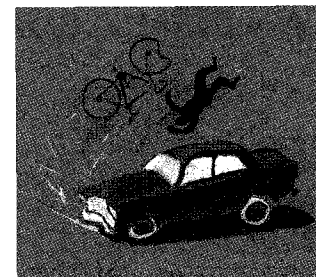
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ZHANG HUAN

The intense Chinese performance artist Huan stares out at the viewer from these photographs with a shaved head and a challenging expression, as if to remind us that his chosen form is not for wimps. Most of the actions documented in these glossy c-prints involve some kind of crawling or heaving, often while naked. Despite his military bearing, Huan has a great feel for aesthetics, marrying the traditional endurance performance with rich colors and unexpected elements—stacks of books, calligraphy, animal bones. The resulting photographs are worlds away from old-school grainy black-and-white performance documents. Some of the best images, like his well-known photographic series of men standing in a pond in order to raise the water level, are also the most simple and poetic. Through Oct. 28. (Max Lang, 229 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 212-980-2400.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK THE RAIN IN SPAIN

As a sidebar to the New York Film Festival, the Walter Reade Theatre is presenting a season of movies that were originally brought to America by Janus Films. The company was started fifty years ago



by two friends from Harvard, and without its zestful influence many people might never have been introduced to the work of Fellini, Truffaut, Ophuls, Mizoguchi, and a host of other masters. Among the rarer treats in the series is "Death of a Cyclist," from 1955, by the Spanish director Juan Antonio Bardem, which will be screened Oct. 25-26. The title is fulfilled in the opening seconds: the cyclist is hit by a car, the car is driven by an adulterous wife whose lover is seated beside her, and their love is instantly doomed. The film is a revelation in everything from its unlikely climate (wet streets, afternoon fogs, lone leafless trees out of Beckett) to the startling cuts with which Bardem speedily moves through the maze of high society. Best of all, it stars Lucia Bosé: fearful yet serene, and already a star from her performance in Michelangelo Antonioni's "Story of a Love Affair." Even without the crime, her beauty is enough to break the law.

—Anthony Lane

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ALFRED JENSEN

In his "Number Paintings," Jensen does his best to relocate digits from their Western lodging in science to realms of mysticism, religion, and chance. Grids with bright-colored squares and hand-painted numbers recall minimalist systems and arcane mathematical equations but also reference concepts as diverse as growth-hormone research, the Mayan calendar, and Goethe's color theory. There's more than a little pretension involved in this kind of wide-angle pseudo-philosophizing, but the works here, created between 1960 and 1980, balance that with visual, painterly rewards. Thickly impastoed, gestural, and quirky, they remind us that painting can riff on mathematics and still engage the opposite side of the brain. Through Oct. 28. (Pace Wildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-929-7000.)

GEORGE MACIUNAS

Maciunas (1931-78) is best known as a leading member of the sixties Fluxus movement. The charts, diagrams, films, documents, and atlases here bear some marks of Fluxus—particularly the lo-fi, D.I.Y. elements—but they also draw heavily on Maciunas's personal history and heritage (his mother was Russian, his father Lithuanian). The "Atlas of Russian History" is a painstakingly drawn series of history-book maps diagramming the progress of Russia starting in 7 B.C. Similarly, the "Biography Chroniching Activity Between 1939-1978" and "Diagram of Historical Development of Fluxus" serve as conceptual self-portraits. Others, like his ancient-Chinese art-history outlines, look like final-exam study notes but function as simultaneously didactic and user-friendly art. Through Oct. 28. (Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549.)

JOE SOLA

For previous projects, Sola has jumped out of windows, been tackled by football players, and ridden a roller coaster with porn stars; here, he turns his attention to a seemingly benign medium, with a show titled "Let's Go Do Some Watercolor Painting." His small, washy pictures depict a bouquet of microphones, things one wouldn't want to step on (banana peel, rake, ketchup packet), and trophies and ribbons for also-rans and failures. Their low-tech deadpan irony is reiterated by a marvelously goofy video, made with the playwright Will Eno, in which Sola portrays an anodyne public-TV painting instructor who meets with an unlikely accident. Exuberance and humor, the laugh-inducing lurch of a surprise: Sola doesn't seem to see much difference between watercolor paint and the roller coaster. Through Nov. 14. (Bespoke, 547 W. 27th St. 212-695-8201.)

"SMALL SCULPTURE"

Size matters, but the real action here is in the relationships set up between objects, both present and absent. Robert Gober's hyper-illusionistic paint can cast in lead crystal and carefully colored recalls Jasper Johns's beer cans—although Johns is represented here by sculpture from a series of lighting fixtures cast in bronze. Vija Celmins's fur-lined box filled with Plexiglas puzzle pieces recalls Meret Oppenheim's iconic fur-wrapped teacup at MOMA. And Charles Ray's tiny "Handheld Bird," a painted steel sculpture of an avian embryo, recalls Brancusi's orbs. With so many points of reference bouncing around, the notion of size is practically inconsequential—until one takes into account how much can be accomplished when the pressure of creating something monumental is suspended. Through Oct. 28. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.)

Short List

DONALD BAECHLER: Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Oct. 28. KAREN KILIMNIK: 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Nov. 4. ALBERT OEHLER: Lühring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through Oct. 28. KEN PRICE: Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Nov. 4. MATTHEW RITCHIE: Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through Oct. 28.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

LILLIAN BASSMAN

Bassman, one of the mainstays of *Harper's Bazaar* in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, shows new photographs that borrow freely from her past. The largest and most striking pieces here combine reworked fashion photos and closeups of flowers in elegant, exuberant diptychs. Bassman's signature style is intimate and impressionistic; using darkroom manipulation or distorting glass, she softens and abstracts her subjects, zeroing in on an essence that feels lush, liquid, and intensely feminine. A series of smaller flower photos, all made this year, work as vivid footnotes. Through Oct. 28. (Staley Wise, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-6223.)

MARY MISS

Miss shows irregularly shaped black-and-white photo-collages that could be studies for the architectural sculpture and public-art projects that are her primary work. Her subject is usually a structure in the landscape—a partially collapsed pier, pilings in a pond, bleachers beside a tennis court—that she has multiplied and reconfigured into sprawling, imaginary spaces. The slatted wooden gates of a streamside fish trap proliferate madly until all sense of function has been obliterated. Using a Cubist-style, cut-and-paste technique reminiscent of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Hockney, Miss realizes the sculptural potential of the ordinary built environment and invites us to see through her eyes. Through Nov. 22. (Senior & Shopmaker, 21 E. 26th St. 212-213-6767.)

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

In its second week at City Center, A.B.T. offers two beloved Jerome Robbins ballets, the poignant shore-leave caper "Fancy Free," made during the Second World War, and the later dreamy rehearsal-studio ballet "Afternoon of a Faun." Twice this week, in "Afternoon," Ethan Stiefel will embody the languorous, sexually vulnerable dancer who is awoken from his reverie by the approach of a nymph in practice clothes. Michele Wiles and the regal Veronika Part will dance in Balanchine's "Symphonie Concertante" (1945). And a mischievous Angel Corella steps into the role of the hipster cad in Twyla Tharp's "Sinatra Suite." Casts appear on the company's Web site. ♦ Oct. 25 at 7:30: "Symphonie Concertante" (with Wiles, Maxim Beloserkovsky, and Part), "Glow-Stop," and "The Green Table" (with David Hallberg). ♦ Oct. 26 at 7:30: "Clear," "Afternoon of a Faun" (with Stiefel and Stella Abrera), "Sinatra Suite" (with Marcelo Gomes), and "Fancy Free." ♦ Oct. 27 at 8: "Glow-Stop," "Meadow," and "Rodeo." ♦ Oct. 28 at 2: "Clear," "Afternoon of a Faun" (with Stiefel and Abrera), Act II pas de deux from "Swan Lake," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Oct. 28 at 8: "Symphonie Concertante," "Meadow," and "In the Upper Room." ♦ Oct. 29 at 2: "Glow-Stop," "Afternoon of a Faun," "Sinatra Suite" (with Corella), and "Rodeo." ♦ Oct. 31 at 7:30: "Symphonie Concertante," "Glow-Stop," and "The Green Table." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Nov. 5.)

SANKAI JUKU

In "Kagemi" (2000), the Paris-based Butoh company's fourth work to appear at BAM in a decade, everything is bathed in white chalk dust: the seven dancers' robes, their shaved heads, their mask-like faces—even the stage. The Japanese-born choreographer Ushio Amagatsu's series of seven startlingly beautiful tableaux was inspired by an ikebana arrangement, and a canopy of lotus leaves hangs above the dancers, echoing the movement below: floating, weightless, otherworldly. With a score by Takashi Kako and Yoichiro Yoshikawa. (Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 24 and Oct. 26-28 at 7:30 and Oct. 29 at 3.)

DOUG VARONE AND DANCERS

"Lux," the world-première centerpiece of Varone's twentieth-anniversary season, begins with a hesitant, self-questioning solo for the venerable choreographer. It isn't long, however, before others enter and the dance bursts into a maelstrom of group movement, coalescing and scattering, never letting up. That's a Varone trademark, but even by his standards "Lux" is ecstatic, and exhausting. "Boats Leaving," new to New York, set to an Arvo Pärt choral score, takes the same surging rhythm and slows it way down, actually freezing the tableau and focussing attention on naturalistic gesture, Varone's other trademark talent. The two programs also include the extraordinary "Castles" (2004) and the dance that started it all, "The Bench Quartet" (1986). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Oct. 24-25 at 7:30, Oct. 26-27 at 8, Oct. 28 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 29 at 2 and 7:30.)

ANDREA HAENGGI/AMDAT

Haenggi specializes in site-specific dance and video installations usually inspired by architecture, and her new work, "Friction," at Dance Theatre Workshop, maintains an architectural theme: corridors. These are manifest in movable set pieces, in filmed footage of hotel hallways, and in real-time video of offstage scenes, such as the passageway underneath the theatre's raked seating. The video begins like a movie, complete with title and credits, then the performers emerge from the audience, interacting with the screen images to create an illusion of continuity—a never-ending corridor connecting the work's various angles. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 24-28 at 7:30.)

WAVE RISING SERIES

Young Soon Kim, the artistic director of White Wave, is the curator of a two-week festival that will present her own troupe and thirteen others. Many of the best-known participants—Battleworks Dance Company, Molissa Fenley and Dancers, Karl Anderson/SLAMFEST—appear at one of the festival's two galas; the other evenings are stocked with a mix of emerging New York companies and foreign choreographers, like Zurich's Elfi Schaefer-Schafroth and the Brazilian-born, Miami-based Augusto Soledade. (John Ryan Theatre, 25 Jay St., Brooklyn. 718-855-8822. Oct. 25 at 7:30 (gala), Oct. 26-27 at 7:30, and Oct. 28-29 at 4 and 7:30. Through Nov. 5.)

BORIS CHARMATZ AND DIMITRI CHAMBLAS

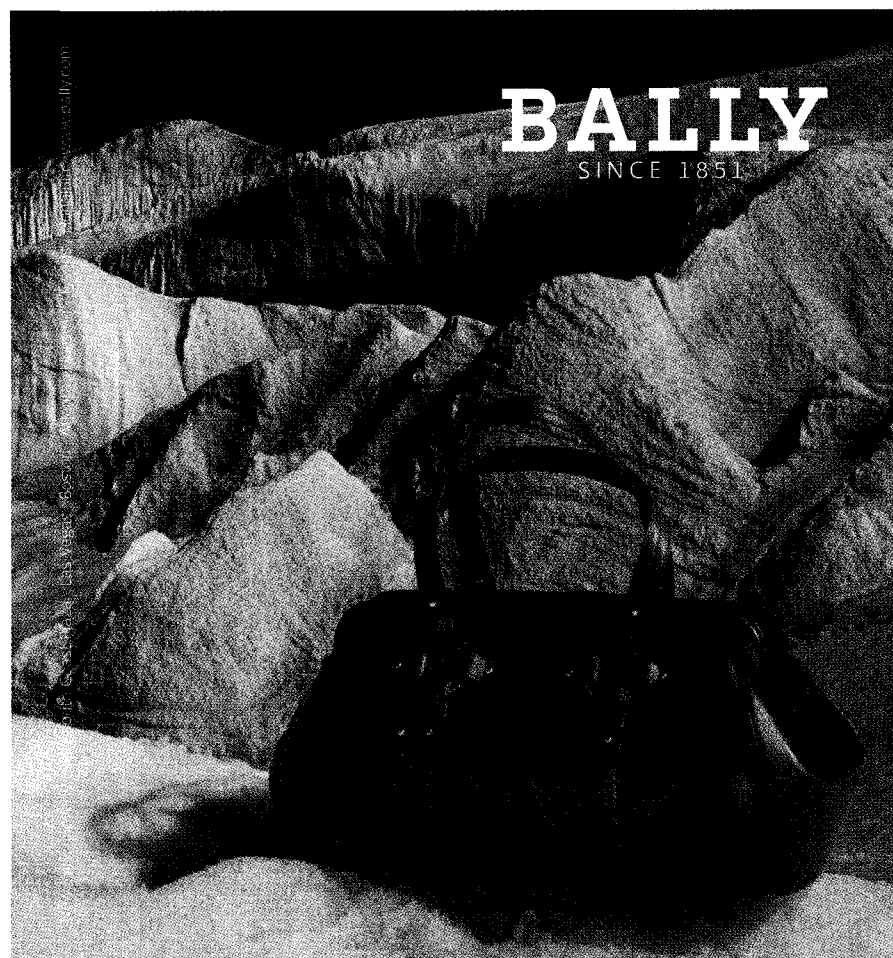
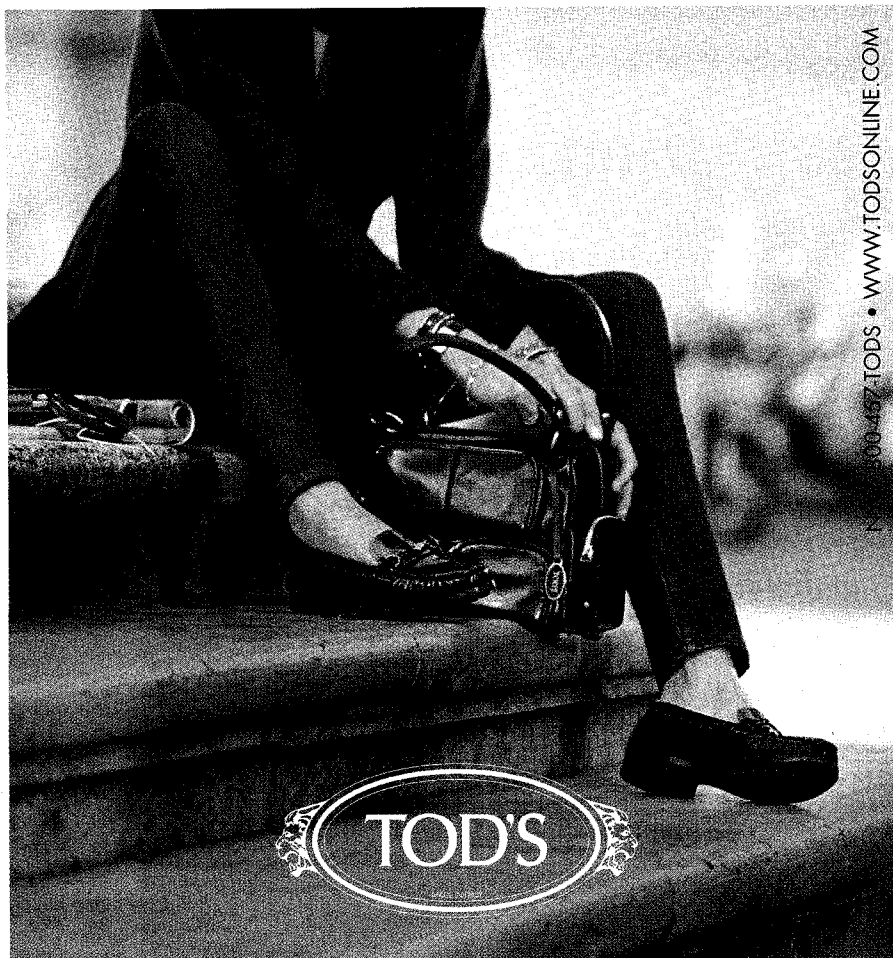
The French choreographers Charmatz and Chamblas have built strong European reputations over the past decade. Their 1993 début work, "À Bras le Corps," created when they were teenagers, gets its U.S. première as part of the European Dream Festival at Danspace Project. In-the-round seating brings the audience dangerously close to the two men as they grapple, lift, and hurl one another in a stark and visceral trial. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 26-28 at 8:30.)

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY

Two "Works & Process" evenings at the Guggenheim provide a rare chance to hear the ordinarily circumspect Taylor, now seventy-six, discuss works like "Company B," "Promethean Fire," "Airs," "Profiles," and the new "Troilus and Cressida (Reduced)." With performances of excerpts by senior members of his company, including Lisa Viola, Michael Trusnovec, Annmaria Mazzini, and Orion Duckstein. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Oct. 29-30 at 7:30.)

BALLET HISPANICO

The latest crowd-pleasing conceit from artistic director Tina Ramirez's versatile, superb company—an opening-night salute to Latin Grammy Award winners—features dances set to music from Tito Puente, Chico O'Farrill, and Gloria Estefan. The good-time program includes Alberto Alonso's "¡Sí Señor! ¡Es Mi Son!" and a revision of last season's "Palladium Nights," a Willie Rosario mambo suite with ballroom braggadocio. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Oct. 31 at 7:30. Through Nov. 12.)



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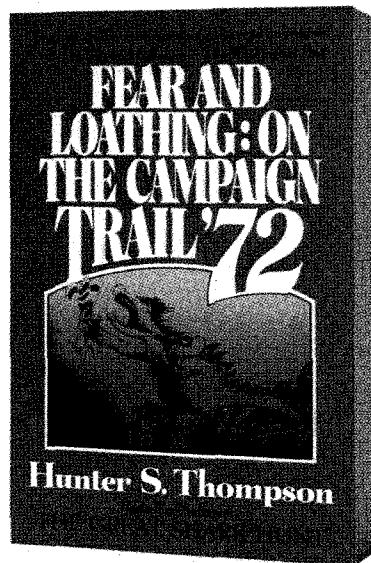
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CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Juan Pons should be a reliably decent "Rigoletto," but the excitement in this revival of Otto Schenk's archconservative production will come from the new Duke—Joseph Calleja, the honey-toned Maltese tenor, making his Met debut. Other débutants include a new Gilda, Ekaterina Siurina, and the conductor, Friedrich Haider. (Oct. 25 at 8 and Oct. 28 at 1:30.) ♦ The Zeffirelli production of opera's most enduring double bill, "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Pagliacci," returns to the repertoire with some impressive casting. The first opera features Maria Guleghina and Franco Farina, while the second is fronted by Patricia Racette and Salvatore Licitra; Marco Armiliato conducts both. (Oct. 26 and Oct. 30 at 8.) ♦ A breath of fresh air wafts into Peter Gelb's new Met, courtesy of "Madama Butterfly." Anthony Minghella's production is awesome, deliberate, and artfully romantic—no surprise to fans of his films. In the title role, Cristina Gallardo-Domás plays a weak hand with stunning success, while Marcello Giordani gives Pinkerton, the American cad, more style and nobility than he perhaps deserves; Asher Fisch. (Oct. 27 and Oct. 31 at 8.) ♦ The return of the Zeffirelli production of "Tosca" brings with it another debut, that of the conductor, Nicola Luisotti, but the powerhouse casting in the roles of Tosca and Cavaradossi—the estimable Andrea Gruber and José Cura—is just as notable. James Morris, who has whittled his interpretation of the villain Scarpia down to a fine point, completes the fatal triangle. (Oct. 28 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

The final performance of "La Bohème," with Inna Dukach, Dana Beth Miller, Dinyar Vania, and Robert Gardner in the leading roles; Steven Mosteller conducts. (Oct. 25 at 7:30.) ♦ "Carmen," with a new cast that features Vanessa Cariddi (in the title role), Kerri Marcinko, Scott Piper, and Daesan No; Gary Thor Wedow. (Oct. 26 at 7:30.) ♦ Tim Albery's production of "Così Fan Tutte," in which the action takes place inside an old-time camera box, worked beautifully at Glimmerglass, allowing the singers to inject some human complexity into what can be the most annoyingly artificial of Mozart's operas. Julianna Di Giacomo, Sandra Piques Eddy, Maureen McKay, Ryan MacPherson, Kyle Pfortmiller, and James Maddalena are the ensemble cast, under the baton of Julius Rudel, City Opera's general director from 1957 to 1979, who returns to conduct after a twenty-five-year absence. (Oct. 27 at 8 and Oct. 29 at 1:30.) ♦ Jonathan Miller, who once set Act III of "Rigoletto" in an Edward Hopper-style diner in Little Italy, comes to City Opera to set "L'Elisir d'Amore" in another greasy spoon, this time in the American Southwest. Leading the cast are Anna Skibinsky, Erin Morley, John Tessier, Paulo Szot, and Jan Opalach; George Manahan. (Oct. 28 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

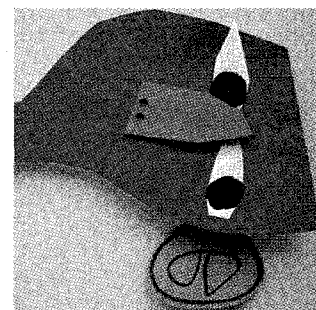
ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Now that the great Ligeti has passed away, the city's flagship orchestra is taking an increasing interest in the Hungarian composer's scores. "Lontano," a brief but evocative masterwork, will suffice for now; Jonathan Nott, an expert in Ligeti's music, conducts it, along with works by another great Hungarian, Bartók (the Piano Concerto No. 1, with Peter Serkin), and by Beethoven (the Fifth Symphony and the "King Stephen" Overture). (Oct. 26 at 7:30, Oct. 27 at 2, and Oct. 28 at 8.) ♦ Note: Nott and the orchestra will give another performance of the Fifth Symphony in a rush-hour "Inside the

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK GREEN THOUGHTS

Earlier this month, a sound-art festival called "Ear to the Earth" stealthily occupied spaces around Lower Manhattan, creating exotic soundscapes and sending



out subliminal messages about the fragility of the environment. Endangered birds of Madagascar chirped and squawked inside the World Financial Center. Various species' songs and cries were electronically processed in installations at the multimedia space 3-Legged Dog, on Greenwich Street. And, in the Elevated Acre, the hidden rooftop park on Water Street, the sound artists Bruce Odland and Sam Auinger presented a project entitled "Elevated Harmonies," which offered a new way of hearing a denatured world. A sixteen-foot tube was suspended above the roadway, catching the rumble and clatter of cars, buses, helicopters, and passing boats. The sounds were broken down into fundamentals and overtones, then broadcast into the park from three cube-shaped loudspeakers made of cement. Aggravating noise metamorphosed into calming drones. On the last day of Indian summer, a few people sat on benches beside the cubes, listening to the city's secret song.

—Alex Ross

Music" concert, hosted by the composer and raconteur Peter Schickele. (Oct. 25 at 6:45.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

RIVERSIDE SYMPHONY

Stravinsky's *Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra* is one of the rarer delicacies of his neo-Classical period, an homage to Weber that he wrote for himself to play. Adam Neiman sits in the composer's chair in this performance with George Rothman's *hardy ensemble*, which also performs seldom heard works by Prokofiev (the "Symphonic Song" and selections from the "Prodigal Son" ballet) and the Symphony No. 1 by Henri Dutilleul, the dean of French composers. (Alice Tully Hall. Oct. 25 at 7:30. 212-721-6500.)

"STEVE REICH @ 70"

Lincoln Center takes its turn to salute New York's minimalist master with two concerts featuring several major works. The first is offered by the Los Angeles Master Chorale, which performs the New York premiere of "You Are (Variations)," a work that employs Biblical texts and words by Wittgenstein; also featured is "Tehillim," a powerful setting of Hebrew psalms, from the nineteen-eighties. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Oct. 28 at 8.)

KIROV ORCHESTRA

In the final concert of its centennial tribute to Shostakovich, St. Petersburg's dark jewel of an orchestra, conducted by Valery Gergiev, offers two tragic masterworks: the Symphony No. 8, written in the midst of the Second World War, and the Symphony No. 13, an echo of one of its more horrifying incidents, the 1941 massacre of Ukrainian Jews at Babi Yar (featuring the bass Nikolai Putilin). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. Oct. 29 at 3.)

MENACHEM PRESSLER AND THE PRAGUE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The musicians of Prague, the site of some of Mozart's big successes, have just as much right as anyone to stake a claim to authentic performances of his music. One of the city's finest ensembles comes to the Metropolitan Museum (with the pianist, a longtime Met favorite) to perform the Symphony No. 40 and the Piano Concerto No. 27 along with works by Barber and Schubert (the Symphony No. 5 in B-Flat Major). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 29 at 7.)

RECITALS

BEN HEPPNER

The magnificent heldentenor, a busy man around town these days, performs (with the pianist Thomas Muraco) what should be a highly agreeable recital of songs by Grieg, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky, and Tosti. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 25 at 8.)

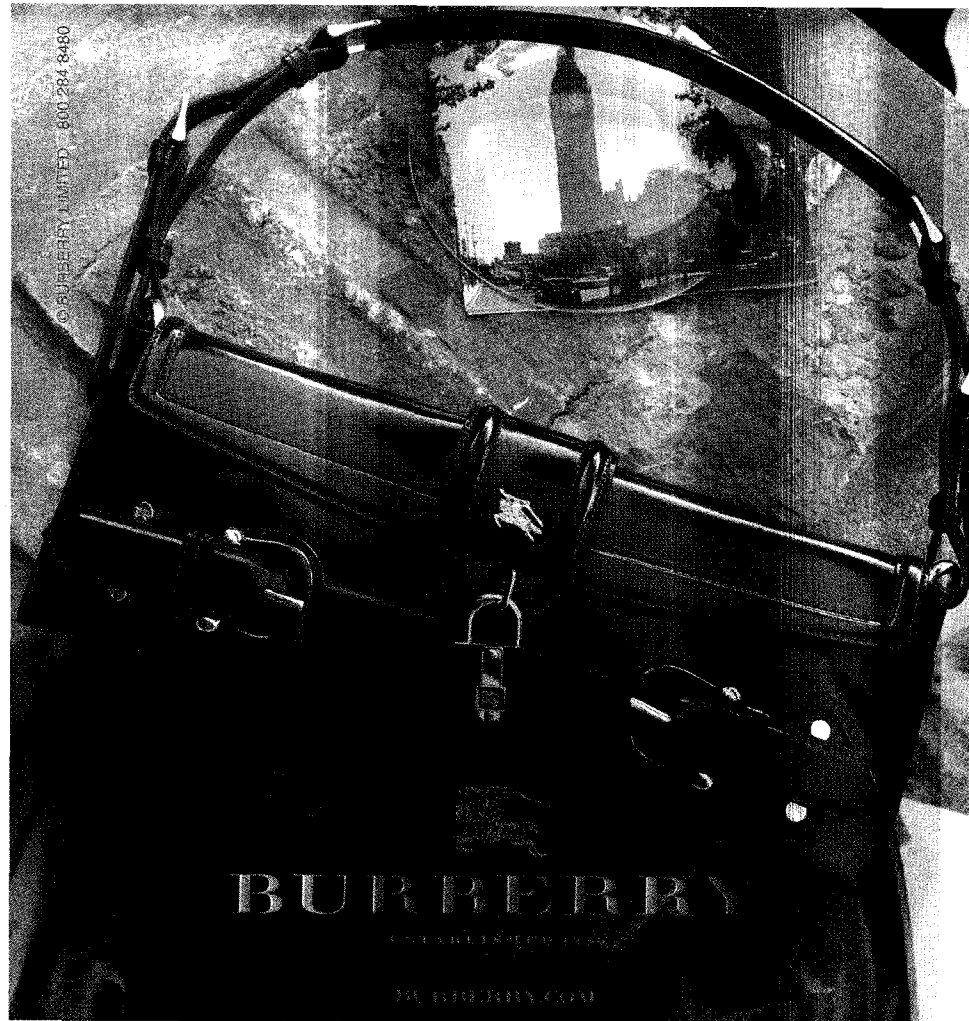
PIANISTS AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

A wise and gracious artist, a notoriously unpredictable one, and a young hopeful, one after the other. Oct. 25 at 8: András Schiff makes a welcome contribution to the dying months of the Mozart Year with a recital that features the Sonata in A Major, K. 331 ("Alla Turca") and the Fantasy in D Minor, K. 397. ♦ Oct. 26 at 8: The unquestionably brilliant, if eccentric, Romantic pianist Ivo Pogorelich offers a powerful trio of sonatas by Chopin (No. 3 in B Minor), Scriabin, and Rachmaninoff (No. 2 in B-Flat Minor, in the revised version). ♦ Oct. 29 at 3: The Israeli-born Benjamin Hochman, a former student of Richard Goode's, performs a program of works by Bach (the Fifth Partita), Berg, Schubert (the Sonata in C Minor, D. 958), and Wiesenberg (a premiere). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

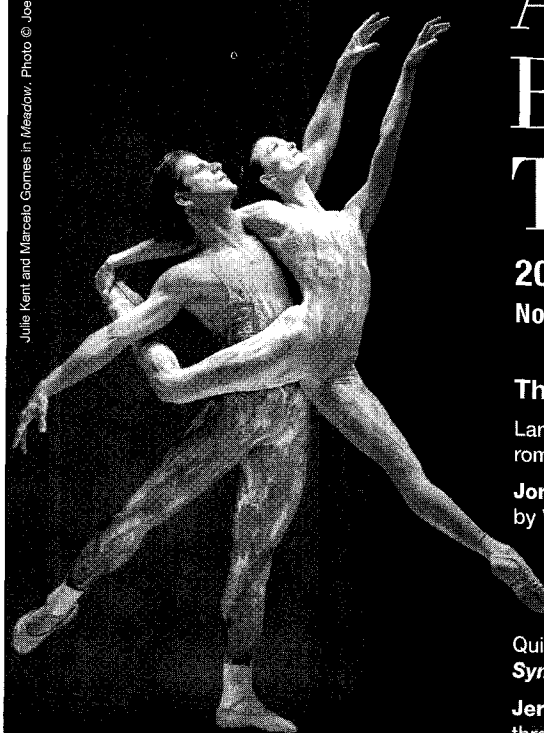
MILLER THEATRE

Oct. 26 at 8: John Zorn—the Aaron Copland of downtown—is a protean virtuoso composer whose interests range from jazz to avant-garde classical, with the powerful influences of rock and klezmer music never far away. The recent winner of a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant," he

LAURIE ROSENWALD



Julie Kent and Marcelo Gomes in *Meadow*. Photo © Joe McNally.



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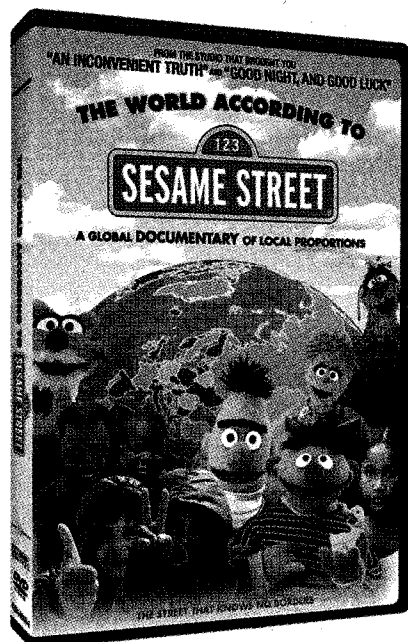
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receives a worthy tribute concert from such musicians as the vocalist Mike Patton and the pianist Stephen Drury, who offer several world-première works. ♦ Oct. 28 at 8: The English Baroque violinist John Holloway's interpretations of Bach's solo works may lack the fire of a Heifetz or a Kremer, but they have an austere intensity that is difficult to ignore. His latest concert features the Sonata No. 2 in A Minor and the Partitas Nos. 2 (with the Chaconne) and 3. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799.)

ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

Few quartets can challenge this Canadian ensemble for its accuracy, energy, and interpretive insight. Shostakovich has been a preoccupation of late, but they will bring music by their countryman R. Murray Schafer to Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, along with quartets by Haydn (in G Major, Op. 77, No. 1) and Ravel. (212-247-7800. Oct. 27 at 7:30.)

THE BRIDGE

Eric Steel directed this documentary, inspired by "Jumpers," a story in *The New Yorker* by Tad Friend, about the allure of the Golden Gate Bridge to people who are considering suicide. Opening Oct. 27. (In wide release.)

CATCH A FIRE

A thriller, directed by Phillip Noyce, based on the true story of the African National Congress fighter Patrick Chamusso. Starring Derek Luke and Tim Robbins. In Afrikaans, Zulu, and English. Opening Oct. 27. (In wide release.)

CLIMATES

Reviewed below in Now Playing. In Turkish. Opening Oct. 27. (Film Forum.)

DEATH OF A PRESIDENT

A drama, directed by Gabriel Range, which explores what might happen if President George W. Bush were assassinated. Opening Oct. 27. (Angelika Film Center and 62nd & Broadway.)



POP NOTES TOP DOWN

After releasing "The Black Album," in 2003, Jay-Z claimed to be retiring from rapping, which seemed to mean that he would keep rapping all the time. On November 21, he will officially end this farcical retirement when he releases "Kingdom Come," on Def Jam records. Since Jay-Z is also the president and C.E.O. of Def Jam, it is a peculiar, if not exactly unprecedented, event (Herb Alpert co-founded A&M records in 1962 and had hits on the label throughout the decade).

A song from the album, "Show Me What You Got," leaked to the Internet in early October. Jay-Z begins with an apology—"What you want me to do? I'm sorry. I'm back"—but he doesn't sound very sorry. He sounds like Jay-Z, confident and slick, the "Mike Jordan of recording" that he claims to be in verse number one. This sangroid is exactly what made him famous in the first place. As with other powerful figures, Jay-Z's calm is even more conspicuous given the frenetic activity surrounding him, which in this case is a glorious stream of horns

and drums created by producer Just Blaze, who samples nineteen-seventies recordings by the Lafayette Afro Rock Band and Johnny Pate that were originally (and legendarily) sampled by Public Enemy and Wreckx-n-Effect. The result is a piece of unexpectedly robust music completely at odds with the thin, bleepy sound of most current hip-hop. A live band plays along with the samples, sometimes overenthusiastically, and Jay-Z needs this extra energy, as he is beginning to sound too comfortable. (He's clever enough to do an entertaining parsing of the words "give" and "take" but not hungry enough to make his wordplay stick.) What made Jay-Z appealing when he was a struggling youngster was that he already sounded like one of the top brass. Now he's in the uncomfortable position of needing to sound like a struggling youngster who also happens to own part of the New Jersey Nets. To put it more simply: does anyone want to hear a C.E.O. rap?

—Sasha Frere-Jones

AKI TAKAHASHI: MORTON FELDMAN 80TH BIRTHDAY CONCERT

The pianist, one of Feldman's favorite artists, plays two solo works by the godfather of New York minimalism, the formidable "Piano" (1977) and one of his final pieces, the grandly lyrical "For Bunita Marcus." (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 28 at 7:30.)

TOKYO STRING QUARTET

A series of Schumann concerts at the 92nd Street Y begins with the redoubtable group, whose members offer the "Märchenbilder," for viola and piano, the Piano Quartet (with Alon Goldstein), and the String Quartet No. 3 in A Major. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 28 at 8.)

SAW III

Another horror sequel. Directed by Darren Lynn Bousman, starring Tobin Bell, Angus Macfadyen, and Dina Meyer. Opening Oct. 27. (In wide release.)

SHUT UP & SING

A documentary by Barbara Kopple and Cecilia Peck about the Dixie Chicks. Opening Oct. 27. (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

NOW PLAYING

CLIMATES

The Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan daringly casts himself and his wife, Ebru Ceylan, in the lead roles of this poignant yet hard-edged modernist melodrama. During a beachside summer vacation, Isa, a struggling university lecturer, senses that his marriage to Bahar, a television art director, is falling apart, and, at his suggestion, they separate. He drifts through life in cosmopolitan, artistic Istanbul until he learns that Bahar has left town to work on a film in Turkey's rural, tradition-bound East and takes off to find her. Ceylan's long takes and brooding closeups capture the faces, gestures, and longings of Istanbul's aging bourgeois bohemians, as well as the moody nuances of actual and emotional weather—the ice storm brewing between Isa and Bahar at a

MOVIES OPENING

ABSOLUTE WILSON

A documentary by Katharina Otto-Bernstein about the theatre director Robert Wilson. Opening Oct. 27. (Lincoln Plaza Cinema and Quad Cinema.)

BABEL

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 27. (In wide release.)

balmy resort, the passionate heat of lovers during a blizzard. Shifting effortlessly between his characters' outer and inner realities with a novelist's omniscient aplomb, he nonetheless stays resolutely outside their motives in the film's most dangerous scene, a sexual conquest that appears to be rape. Paradoxically, the film's troubling ambiguities are among its virtues: under the guise of the universal theme of love and its mysteries, Ceylan offers a glimpse of harsh and unresolved local particulars. In Turkish.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

THE DEPARTED

This merrily vicious and violent Martin Scorsese film about cops and gangsters in Boston will never haunt your sleep, as "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull" do, but it will keep you excited and amused for well over two hours. A South Boston mobster (Jack Nicholson) recruits a young neighborhood kid and later places him, as a grownup (played by Matt Damon), in the Massachusetts State Police; the police, in turn, place their own undercover guy (Leonardo DiCaprio) in the crime boss's outfit. It's a double-mole story in which the two moles, in the end, wind up hunting each other. "The Departed" is a remake of the Hong Kong thriller "Infernal Affairs," directed by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, and it has the speed and volatility of a Hong Kong movie. But Scorsese and the screenwriter, William Monahan, have added weight to the story by digging deep into urban tribal lore—the memories of loyalty and betrayal going back decades, the nasty old jokes, the bullying insults and invective. Nicholson doesn't seem to take the movie very seriously—he has a ball singing Irish ditties and making rat faces and holding up severed hands—but everyone else is both disciplined and highly adept at delivering the foulmouthed idiom. With Martin Sheen, Mark Wahlberg, and Alec Baldwin as cops, and Vera Farmiga as a police psychiatrist who is attracted to both young men.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/16/06.) (In wide release.)

51 BIRCH STREET

In this infuriating yet fascinating documentary, the filmmaker Doug Block discovers secrets about his parents' lives yet seems naively irritated that they should have had any. Three months after Block's mother suddenly died, his father announced that he would marry a woman who had been his secretary in the nineteen-sixties and would move to Florida to be with her. Clearing out the family house in Port Washington, Long Island, Block found three decades' worth of his mother's diaries, which confirmed his new suspicions about his parents' marriage, though in surprising ways. He brings together videotaped interviews with his parents, his father's new wife, their friends, and other relatives to fill in a portrait that he had hitherto seen only in vague outlines. One wants to tell Block to get over it, and yet, as the film shows, touchingly, he can't: as Block haltingly asks his father intimate questions while fixed in his stern, judgmental gaze, the viewer relives with him the drama of the eternal child who can't see past his parents' authority to their humanity.—*R.B.* (Cinema Village.)

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

INFAMOUS

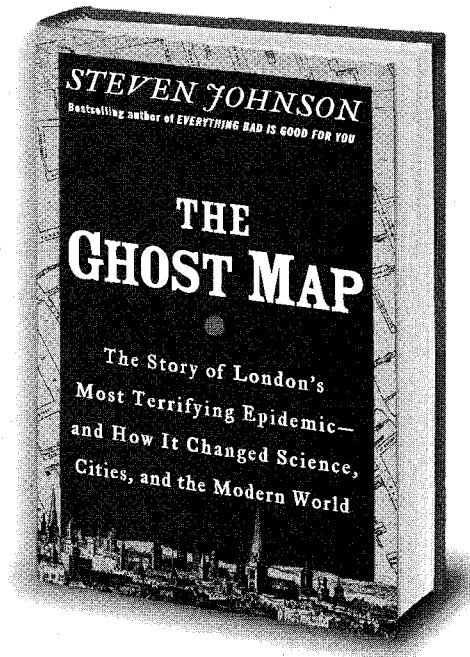
Douglas McGrath follows much the same path that was taken by last year's "Capote." Each film is not just about Truman Capote but, more specifically, about the murders in Kansas that led him to write "In Cold Blood" and, in so doing, to breach the borders between fiction and reporting. The new movie is more acute on the temptations offered by that process; we see Capote (Toby Jones) writing down different versions of what an interviewee said, to see which sounds the smoothest. Jones is the living image of Capote, catching his fluting tones and the small man's Napoleonic need to fill a room. McGrath tracks him from a gold-lit, gossiping New York to the bloodstains of the Clutter household; and so to the gallows, and then back to New York, which suddenly, to Capote and to us, seems like far less fun. (Hence the crooning, sad-sweet cameo from Gwyneth Paltrow that runs

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over the opening credits.) With Sandra Bullock as Nelle Harper Lee, Jeff Daniels as the detective, Daniel Craig as one of the killers, and, scariest of all, Juliet Stevenson as Diana Vreeland.—*Anthony Lane* (10/23/06) (In wide release.)

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND

For the role of General Idi Amin Dada, the dictator of Uganda in the nineteen-seventies, Forest Whitaker has transformed himself. The laugh has become enormous, the arms like grappling hooks. This dictator has a terrifying affability: like many sociopaths, he can be intensely empathic. He figures out what people want, but, once you have received his generosity, he believes you belong to him forever. Whitaker goes all the way into Amin's childlike flights of fantasy and egotistical visions, and, as he speaks, one eye opens wide and the other droops malevolently—even his vision is schizoid. James McAvoy is the cocky young Scottish doctor who becomes the general's physician and confidant. Flattered by the great man's interest in him, he refuses to notice the purges and the slaughter going on in the country. Kevin Macdonald, who earlier made documentaries ("One Day in September" and "Touching the Void"), concentrates on the relationship of the two men, and makes something tense and alive out of it. With Gillian Anderson. Shot in Uganda.—*D.D.* (10/2/06) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

LITTLE CHILDREN

A disappointed young mother (Kate Winslet) who has given up graduate school for a lousy marriage in the suburbs starts an affair with a former golden-boy college jock (Patrick Wilson), who is also married but stranded in adulthood. There's an element of garden-variety suspense in Todd Field's new movie, which he adapted with Tom Perrotta from Perrotta's novel—will the lovers run away together? But the movie is about a lot more. In a community devoted to the protection of children, a convicted sex offender (Jackie Earle Haley) shows up. The consternation he creates is so extreme that it seems the filmmakers

might be suggesting a metaphor for the indeterminate but all-encompassing threat of terrorism; at the least, they are suggesting that both men and women are transferring their sexual frustrations and fears onto a pervert. The filmmakers' tone veers between a slightly mischievous irony and the most generous sympathy. The sex scenes are brief, naked, heated, startling. In all, it's a beautifully crafted piece of work that leaves you saddened by the mistakes that decent people make but also hopeful about the possibilities of renewal. With Noah Emmerich as a hysterical ex-cop and Jennifer Connelly as a loving wife more interested in her baby son than in her handsome but hapless husband.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

MARIE ANTOINETTE

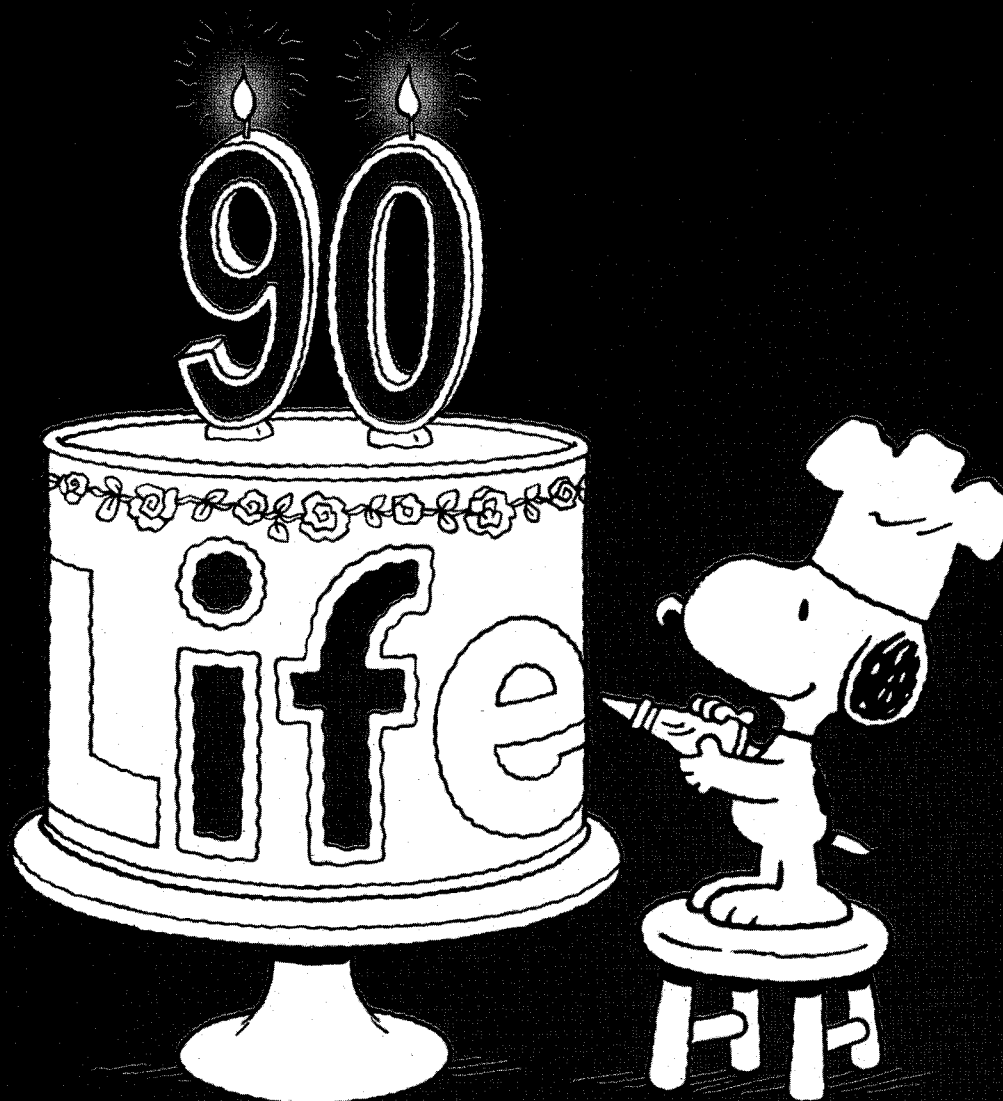
If you want your movies to feel like watered silk—lustrous, precious, and thinner than skin—then Sofia Coppola's latest venture is for you. Kirsten Dunst, who even at her ditziest gives off a whiff of the narcoleptic, stars as Marie Antoinette, betrothed as an Austrian teen-ager to the clueless Dauphin of France (Jason Schwartzman). The sexual allure of her husband is on a par with the pink blancmanges on the dinner table, which is bad news for the royal succession but good for Coppola, who is left free to concentrate on desserts, hair styles, footwear, and other essentials of life. The result is less a character study than a pre-Revolutionary style catalogue, unembarrassed in its rage for the superficial. Somewhere beneath the frippery, there is a whisper of political threat: if the Queen really *was* as prodigal and heedless as this, no wonder the mobs were on the march. Toward the end, Coppola does indeed show Versailles under siege, but the onslaught is far too paltry, and too late, to hold any terrors. The cast is a mixed salad: Rip Torn as the randy old King, Asia Argento as his mistress, Judy Davis as a court harpy, and Marianne Faithfull, no less, as the mother of Marie Antoinette.—*A.L.* (10/23/06) (In wide release.)

OLD JOY

Patience is rewarded in Kelly Reichardt's slight but emotionally gripping short feature, based on a story by Jonathan Raymond. Two friends who have grown apart, Mark (Daniel London), a taciturn expecting father, and Kurt (the singer/songwriter Will Oldham), a perpetual stoner, go on a camping trip in search of hot springs in the woods outside Portland, Oregon. Although the seemingly endless shots of roads, cars, and trees become tedious, the lovely Yo La Tengo score and Oldham's performance as a man stubbornly resigned to his slacker life style underscore the poignancy of the moment when he reaches out to his friend who has left him behind.—*Shauna Lyon* (Cinema Village and Film Forum.)

THE QUEEN

The new Stephen Frears film considers the deadlock, both grieving and comical, that followed the death of the Princess of Wales, in 1997. On the one hand, the Queen (Helen Mirren), believing it to be a private matter, stays and broods in Scotland with the Duke of Edinburgh (James Cromwell) and Prince Charles (Alex Jennings). On the other hand, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen), sensing a thirst for public mourning and thus a unique political opportunity, urges Her Majesty to return to London and face down the mob. And so she does; the crux of the drama comes when Mirren turns to the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and, with one smile, quashes any prospect of rebellion. The script, by Peter Morgan, relies largely on well-grounded speculation, and sticklers for accuracy will find the whole thing straying beyond belief; but, thanks to the careful performances, you subscribe all too readily to the movie's suggestion of a divided land—of a Britain caught between the trustworthy stiffness of tradition and a liberalism that is open not just to emotional honesty but to the coarseness of modern excess. With Helen McCrory as a distinctly unceremonious Cherie Blair.—*A.L.* (10/9/06) (In wide release.)



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THE RED AND THE WHITE

In this historical epic, from 1967, the Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó, a great screen choreographer, deploys his forces on the battlefields of the Russian Revolution. The film opens with a bravura three-minute crane shot as Bolsheviks and Hungarian volunteers are fiercely pursued by the White Army along a hilly riverbank. Some survive through feral cunning, only to wander into an undefined war zone of ambushes, arrests, and summary executions, where visual points of view shift and multiply with the bewildering suddenness of combat. Jancsó organizes the swarming and scattered fighters with a stupendous, almost unnoticed virtuosity, delineating the chaotic action in precise, flowing long takes. Though he filmed in the Soviet Union with official cooperation and duly depicts the tsarists' haughty contempt for the passionate ragtag partisans of the popular cause, he stays relentlessly outside his characters' heads in order to get past the rhetoric and bring the great forces of history to life. As the revolutionaries slog through the embattled countryside without leaders and without refuge, Jancsó's bold, defiant judgment emerges silently from the clamor of the bloody pageant: Bolshevism is not the triumphal fulfillment of history but simply suicide. In Russian and Hungarian. —R.B. (Walter Reade Theatre; Oct. 27 and Oct. 30.)

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP

The new project from Michel Gondry proves that he is still determined to treat cinema as an advanced form of child's play. Gael García Bernal plays a young Mexican, recently returned to Paris, who takes a dreary job and meets a couple of French girls when they drill through the wall of his apartment. One of them (Charlotte Gainsbourg) almost becomes his paramour, and his stumbles toward her—not to mention the dreams that he wraps around her—make up the bulk of the story. Gondry scorns any need to mark the border of sleeping and waking, slipping like a spy between the two; normal conversations keep branching off into fantasy, and a grinning Bernal takes every change in stride. The outcome is sometimes jubilant but mostly shapeless, and Gondry could have used some help from Charlie Kaufman, with whom he concocted "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." Despite the sprightly makeover, it's the old problem: when people start telling you their dreams, you don't know where to look. In Spanish, English, and French. —A.L. (9/25/06) (In wide release.)

SHORTBUS

John Cameron Mitchell's sex-drenched study of a group of beautiful, emotionally lost New Yorkers on a quest for intimacy. The movie's central characters—a couples therapist who can't achieve orgasm (Sook-Yin Lee), a depressed ex-hustler and his boyfriend (played by the real-life couple Paul Dawson and PJ DeBoy), and an unhappy dominatrix (Lindsay Beamish)—are stereotypes of sad and lonely outsiders, but Mitchell's eager camerawork and playful screenplay filled with snappy comic asides make up for the film's emotional limitations. When everyone comes together at Shortbus, an underground sex club, the film exposes itself for what it really is—a sentimental, neo-romantic film in which hedonism is a tonic for the masses. —Bruce Diones (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE GRUDGE 2: In wide release. **THE GUARDIAN:** In wide release. **MAN OF THE YEAR:** In wide release. **THE MARINE:** In wide release. **OPEN SEASON:** In wide release. **THE PRESTIGE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Oct. 25-26 at 7 and 9: "Masai: The

Rain Warriors" (2005, Pascal Plisson; in Masai). Oct. 28 at 6 and 8:30: "Who Is Bozo Texino?" (2005, Bill Daniel), introduced by the filmmaker. ♦ Oct. 29 at 8: New videos by Yann Beauvais and Edson Barrus. ♦ "Essential Cinema." Oct. 28 at 6:15: Films by Bruce Baillie, including "Quixote" (1964-65). ♦ Oct. 29 at 8:15: Short films by Baillie, Jordan Belson, and Douglass Crockwell.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Made in (Brooklyn) NY." Oct. 26 at 7: "Blue in the Face" (1995, Wayne Wang and Paul Auster). ♦ The films of Pedro Almodóvar. All films are in Spanish. Oct. 27 and Oct. 29 at 4:30, Oct. 28 at 6:50, and Oct. 31 at 9:30: "Law of Desire" (1987). ♦ Oct. 27 and Oct. 29 at 6:50 and Oct. 28 and Oct. 30 at 9:30: "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988). ♦ Oct. 27 and Oct. 29 at 9:30 and Oct. 28 at 4:30: "Matador" (1986). ♦ Oct. 30 at 6:50: "Talk to Her" (2002). ♦ Oct. 31 at 6:50: "All About My Mother" (1999).



The director Nuri Bilge Ceylan co-stars with his wife, Ebru Ceylan, in "Climates."

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Oct. 25 and Oct. 30-31 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Aguirre, the Wrath of God" (1972, Werner Herzog; in German). ♦ Oct. 26-29: Films produced by the Soros/Sundance Documentary Fund. For program information, go to www.filmforum.org.

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—French comedies. Oct. 31 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Tanguy" (2001, Étienne Chatiliez; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Eric Rohmer's "Six Moral Tales." Oct. 27-29 at noon: "Chloe in the Afternoon" (1972; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 27-28: "Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn" (1987, Sam Raimi). ♦ "Ecotopia." Oct. 30 at 7: "Chain" (2005, Jem Cohen). ♦ Oct. 30 at 9: "The World" (2004, Jia Zhangke; in Chinese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Made in NY." Oct. 25 at 6: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Oct. 25 at 8:15: "Manhattan" (1979, Woody Allen). ♦ "Reel New York." Oct. 26 at 6: Short films, including "Ghosts of Grey Gardens" (2004, Lilianna Greenfield-Sanders). ♦ "Kino! 2006: New Films from Germany." All films are in German. Oct. 27 at 6 and Oct. 29 at 2: "The Unknown Soldier" (2006, Michael Verhoeven). ♦ Oct. 27

at 8 and Oct. 29 at 4:15: "Hamburger Lektion" (2006, Romuald Karmakar). ♦ Oct. 28 at 2: "Summer in Berlin" (2005, Andreas Dresen). ♦ Oct. 28 at 8:30: "Winter Journey" (2006, Hans Steinbichler).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"The Japanese Film: A Tribute to Donald Richie." Oct. 27 at 7:30, Oct. 28 at 2, and Oct. 29 at 3: "Samurai Rebellion" (1967, Masaki Kobayashi; in Japanese). ♦ Oct. 28 at 5 and Oct. 29 at 6: "The Woman in the Dunes" (1964, Hiroshi Teshigahara; in Japanese).

PIONEER THEATRE

155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Horror films. Oct. 27 at 8: "Society" (1989, Bryan Yuzna). ♦ Oct. 29 at 7: "The Redsin Tower" (2006, Fred Vogel). ♦ Oct. 30 at 6:30: "Squirm" (1976, Jeff Lieberman).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Oct. 27-28: "Forbidden Zone" (1980, Richard Elfman).

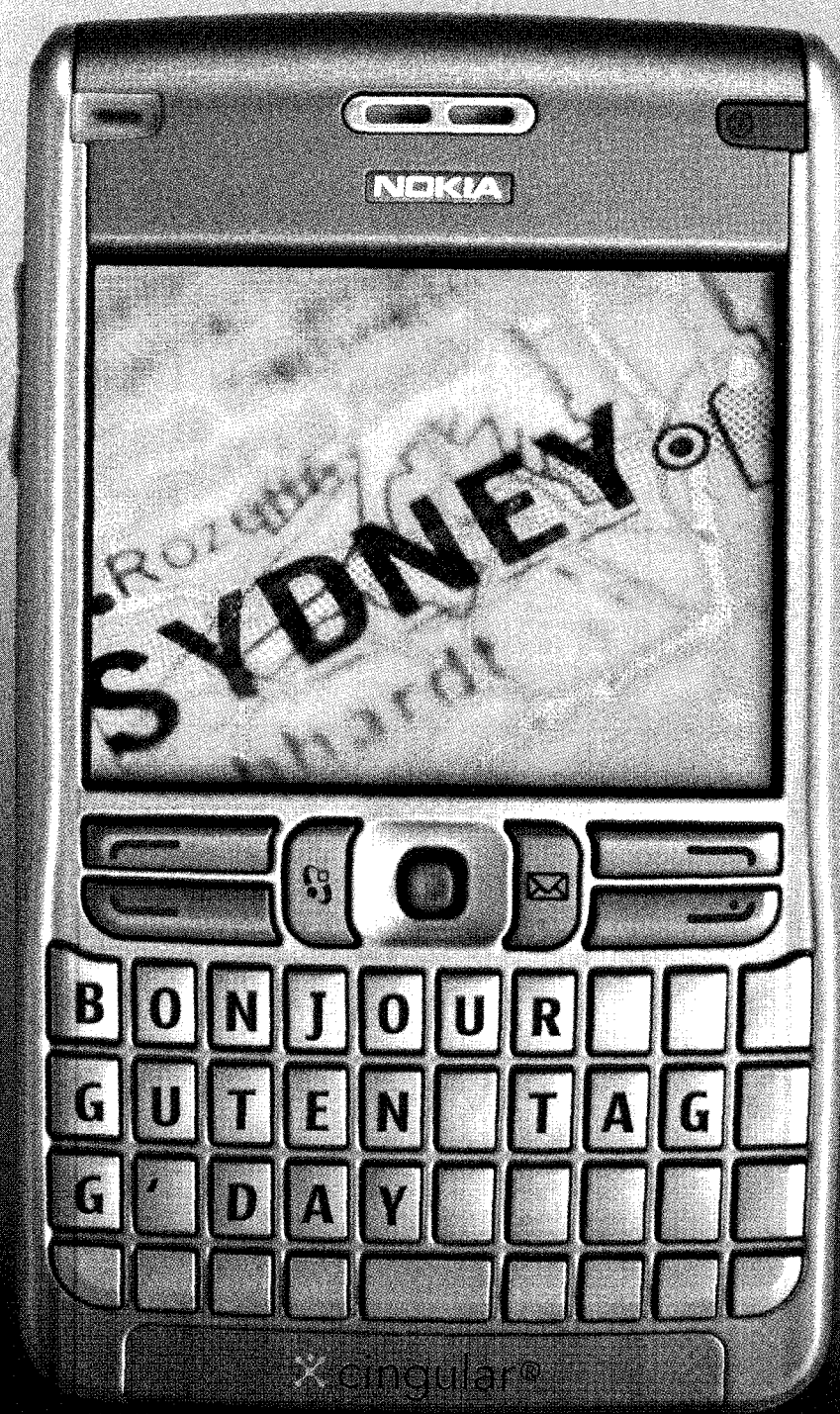
THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Thalia Film Classics." Oct. 29 and Oct. 31 at 5: "A Man Escaped" (1956, Robert Bresson; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"50 Years of Janus Films." Oct. 25 at 1: "Day of Wrath" (1943, Carl Theodor Dreyer; in Danish). ♦ Oct. 25 at 3 and Oct. 26 at 4 and 8:30: "Death of a Cyclist" (1955, Juan Antonio Bardem; in Spanish). ♦ Oct. 25 at 5: "Fires on the Plain" (1959, Kon Ichikawa; in Japanese). ♦ Oct. 26 at 1: "High and Low" (1963, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ "Independents Night." Oct. 26 at 6:30: "Home" (2006, Dawn Scibilia). ♦ Through Nov. 16: "Resistance and Rebirth." Hungarian films. Except where noted, all films are in Hungarian. Oct. 27 at 2 and Oct. 30 at 7:15: "Father" (1966, István Szabó). ♦ Oct. 27 at 4 and Oct. 30 at 9:15: "The Red and the White" (†). ♦ Oct. 27 at 6 and Oct. 31 at 3:15: "Moscow Square" (2001, Ferenc Török). ♦ Oct. 28 at 4 and Oct. 30 at 1: "Refuge England" (1959, Robert Vas) and "Hungary, 1956: Our Revolution" (2006, Mark Kidel; in English and Hungarian). ♦ Oct. 28 at 6:15 and Oct. 30 at 2:45: "Electra, My Love" (1974, Miklós Jancsó). ♦ Oct. 29 at 1: "Recsk" (1989, Géza Böszörményi and Livia Gyarmathy). ♦ Oct. 29 at 5:30 and Oct. 31 at 1: "White Palms" (2006, Szabolcs Hajdú). ♦ Oct. 29 at 7:45 and Oct. 30 at 4:30: "Dealer" (2005, Benedek Fliegauf).

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READINGS AND TALKS

"LINCOLN'S DEPRESSION"

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln gave one of the biggest speeches of his career at Cooper Union's Great Hall. On Oct. 25 at 6:30, Joshua Wolf Shenk, the author of "Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness," and Andrew Solomon, whose books include "The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression," visit the site to talk about the President's darker days. (7 E. 7th St. No tickets necessary.)

"WAR REPORTING FROM THE FRONT LINES"

Reporters who have been covering the situation in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East, including Paul McLeary, a staff writer at the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Joshua Partlow, a staff writer for the *Washington Post*, Walter Rodgers, formerly with CNN, and Manoush Zomorodi, a producer for the BBC, discuss their craft. (Small Press Center, 20 W. 44th St. Oct. 25 at 7. For more information, call 212-929-2588.)

JULES FEIFFER

The veteran cartoonist and illustrator talks about his work, which is the subject of a career-wide retrospective at the School of Visual Arts. (209 E. 23rd St. For more information, call 212-592-2010. Oct. 26 at 6:30.)

ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS

A number of the Academy's chancellors—Frank Bidart, Rita Dove, Galway Kinnell, Philip Levine, Nathaniel Mackey, Kay Ryan, Gerald Stern, and Ellen Bryant Voigt—read from their work. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. For more information, call 212-772-4448. Oct. 26 at 7.)

"AUTISM AND ADVOCACY"

The Francis and Ann Curran Center for American Catholic Studies, at Fordham University, is sponsoring a daylong conference on autism, focussing on the support communities available for persons with this disorder, with a number of noted theologians and academics joining parents of autistic children, their teachers, and others. (McNally Amphitheatre, 140 W. 62nd St. Admission is free, but registration is required. For more information, call 212-636-7698. Oct. 27 from 9 to 4:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"GREAT AUTUMNAL TAXIDERMY GET-TOGETHER"

Last fall, in conjunction with the publication of their book "Carnivorous Nights: On the Trail of the Tasmanian Tiger," the authors Margaret Mittelbach and Michael Crewdson organized a taxidermy contest at Pete's Candy Store, a bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. They've decided to do it again this year in a new location, with a few changes. Mittelbach and Crewdson will be hosting, and the judging of all things stuffed and preserved will be done by Dorian Devins, a radio producer with an interest in science, and Rob Marbury, of the Minneapolis Association of Rogue Taxidermy. Animals on display at last year's event included a mongoose (entwined with a cobra), an armadillo (being used as a handbag), and a crow (dubbed Poe). The contest drew people from all over the metropolitan region, from employees of the Parks Department and the American Museum of Natural History

to professional taxidermists and "various other types," according to Devins, who participated. "I don't know how they found out about it, but they all just showed up with their things." (Union Hall, 702 Union St., Park Slope, Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. Oct. 28 at 8, with a master class and game tasting with a vegan option led by the M.A.R.T.'s Marbury, starting at 5. To sign up for the class, e-mail info@rogue-taxidermy.com.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The decorous yet sensual work of William-Adolphe Bougureau sets the tone at Christie's sale of Orientalist and academic European art (Oct. 25); lovers of refined and decorative objects can also delight in the sumptuous pieces at an auction of silver and vertu (Oct. 26), or in the George II mahogany hall chairs and giltwood console tables in a sale of English furniture (Oct. 27). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Sotheby's impressive auction of jewelry (Oct. 25) features such whimsical offerings as an intricate Renaissance-revival gold-and-enamel necklace with a large cameo pendant depicting a lady in period dress, flanked by a pair of gold-winged busts. The following day features a private collection of French furniture and decorations, with a particular focus on the Third Republic (1870-1940), with many signed works by the Belle Époque *ébéniste* François Linke. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Swann auctions off a collection of magic books, posters, photographs, and other curiosities—with an especially large selection of Houdini-related material—from the collection of Christian Fechner (Oct. 26), a French film producer and Houdini biographer. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



ON THE HORIZON

ART

MAXED OUT

Nov. 5-Jan. 29

The unfortunate Austrian-born Emperor Maximilian of Mexico was killed by a firing squad in June of 1867; within two years, Édouard Manet had made four paintings and a lithograph imagining the scene. MOMA's "Manet and the Execution of Maximilian" looks at the speed with which Manet transformed the event from newspaper fodder to art and at the subtle tweaks he gave the story with each new rendition. (212-708-9400.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND GRT VIEW

Nov. 12

The architectural critic Francis Morrone leads a walking tour of the Greenpoint and Williamsburg waterfront, an industrial area with a rich history. His stops include the ruins of the Greenpoint Terminal Market, the site of a spectacular fire earlier this year. (www.bcue.org.)

MOVIES

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Nov. 15-Dec. 22

Roberto Rossellini burst onto the scene with "Open City," his 1945 drama about

resistance in Rome, which he filmed on location while street battles still raged. With Ingrid Bergman, whom he married, he made a series of melodramas, then turned to historical fictions about Socrates, Jesus, and others. For Rossellini's centenary, MOMA offers the first comprehensive American retrospective. (212-708-9480.)

THE THEATRE MAMET MORALITY

Nov. 15

David Mamet has adapted Harley Granville-Barker's 1905 drama, "The Voysey Inheritance," in which a young man discovers that

his family's wealth has been acquired by the swindling of innocents. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CHERISH THE LADIES

Nov. 19, Dec. 10

The passing of Lorraine Hunt Lieberson is grievous, but other great mezzo-sopranos can still carry the torch. Two of the more glamorous ones—Magdalena Kožená and Angelika Kirchschlager—offer late-autumn song recitals at Alice Tully Hall. (212-721-6500.)

Magdalena Kožená and Angelika Kirchschlager at Alice Tully Hall.

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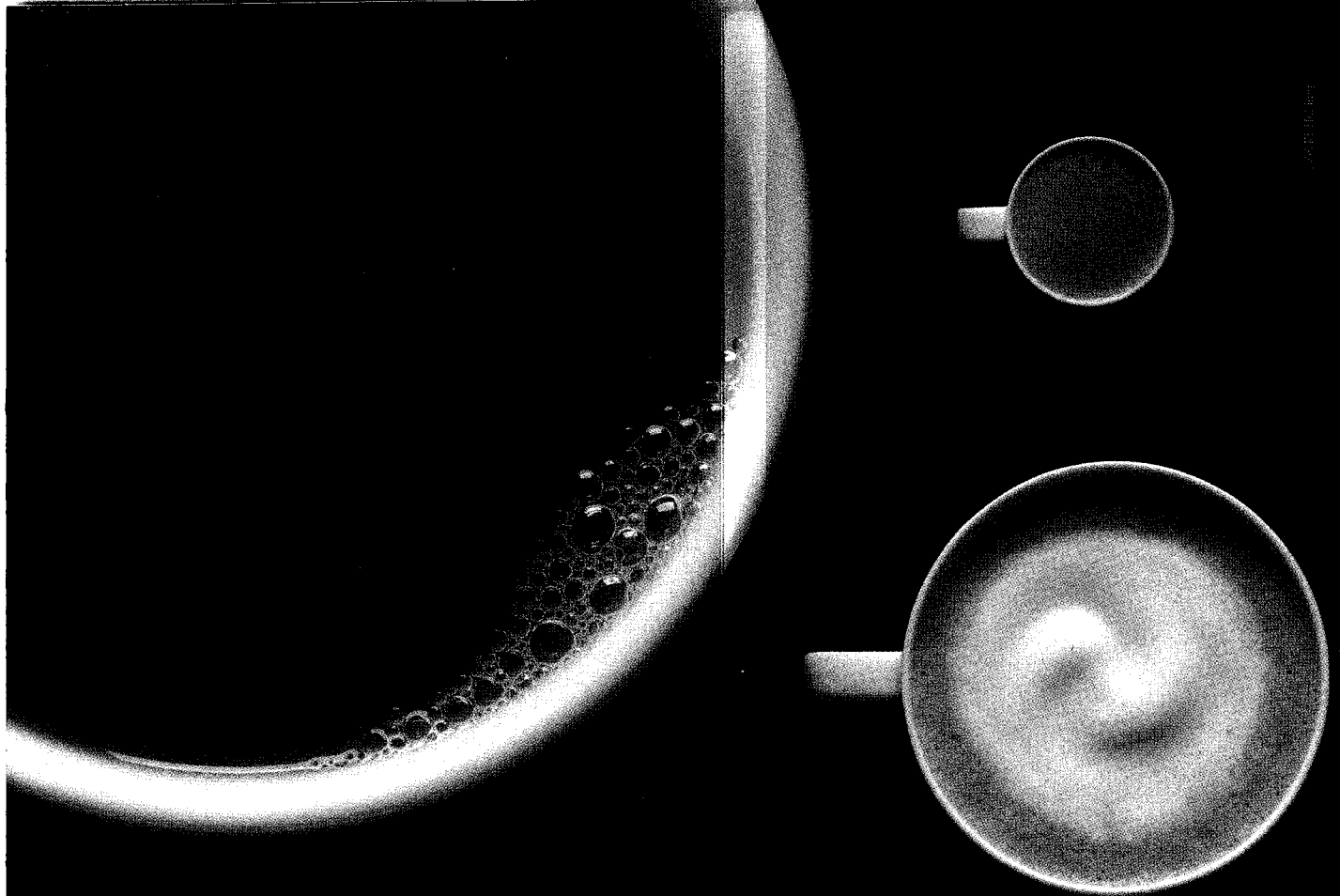


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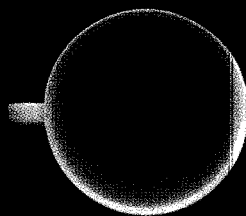


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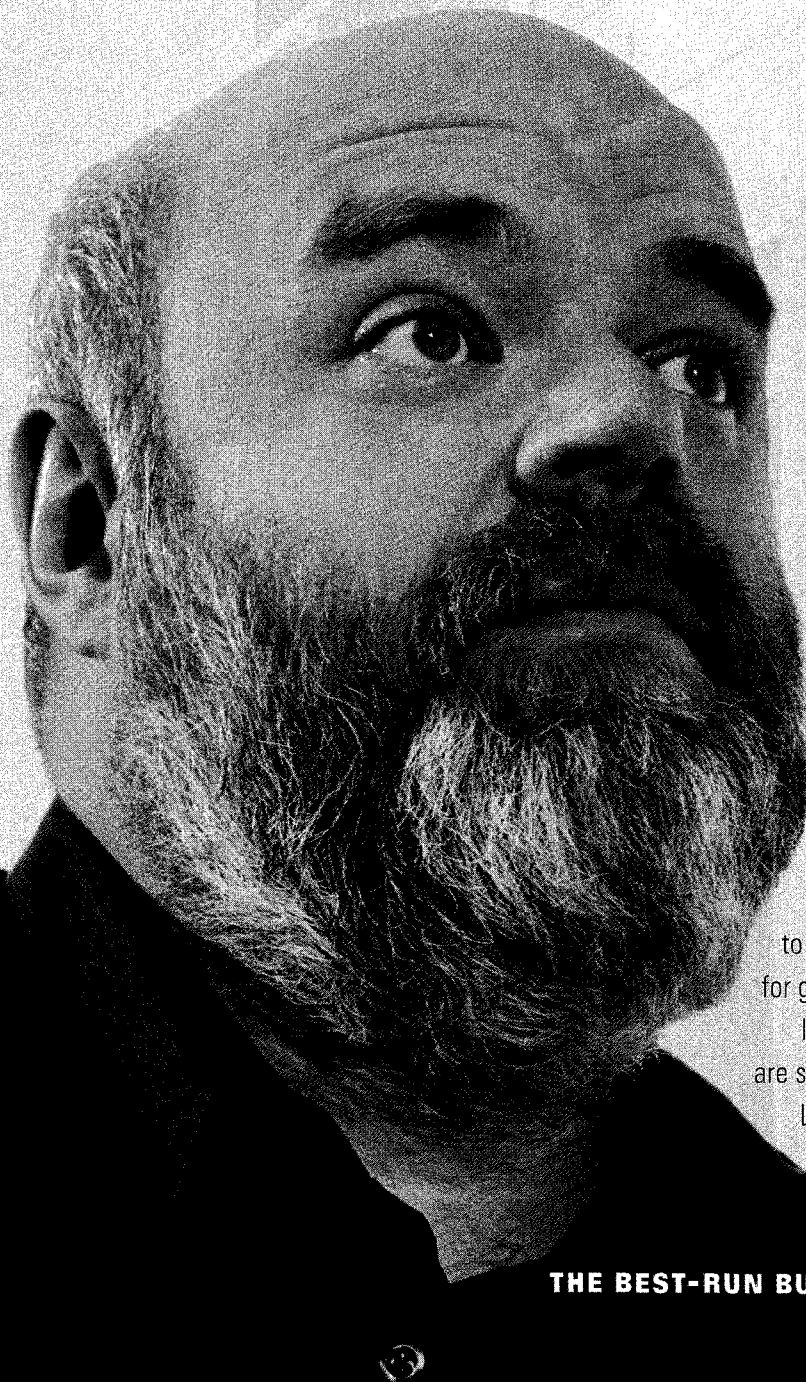


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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT ALTERNATIVE REALITIES



When the National Security Council met to discuss Iraq earlier this month, in Washington, the sense of urgency was palpable. The director of national intelligence described the deterioration of security in Baghdad and Basra; the Iraqi Army was near collapse, he said, and another explosion of sectarian violence was imminent. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported that the American commander in Iraq was asking for two new combat brigades immediately and fifty thousand additional troops in the coming months.

"We've just heard a very dour intel briefing," the national-security adviser said, opening the floor to discussion. "With more resources, can we really get it right? Can we do it better than we've done in the past three and a half years?"

"What is 'it'?" another participant asked. "What do we mean by success? A democratic Iraq?"

"Can we achieve a stable, unified Iraq?" the national-security adviser persisted. "Does anyone here believe that's still possible? And, if not, then Plan A has failed and we have to come up with other options."

"Plan A is dead," the Secretary of State announced, and sketched out a new strat-

egy to bring Iran, Syria, and Iraq's other neighboring countries into negotiations, in order to prevent civil war from spreading across borders. "We have to take what is a hugely eroded leadership position in the international community and try to turn it around. It's a hell of a long shot."

The meeting was remarkable for its clarity: the principals looked at unpleasant facts from every angle, asked fundamental questions about the choices available, criticized past failures, and agreed on new plans without concern for the political fallout. The old habits of wishful thinking and blind loyalty were gone.

If this discussion had taken place at the White House, one could be a little hopeful, not just for a change of policy but for a change of climate in which new policies might be imagined. Instead, it occurred a mile away, at the Brookings

Institution, where a dozen civilian and military officials of previous Administrations had come together for a daylong war game on Iraq.

Conversations like this one are taking place in quiet corners of the government and the military, within small groups of trusted friends, but they are not happening where it matters. Obstacles to critical thinking are not exclusive to this Administration, with its incurious President and its ruthless political "commissars," as they are known among their colleagues. The fear of leaks, and the damage they can do to an appearance of unity and resolve, makes it almost impossible for top officials in any Administration to speak freely in groups of more than three or four. But the resistance intensifies when the White House is under siege. "The worse the situation gets," the imaginary national-security adviser said, "the harder it is to make the point that there's a problem." When the real Office of Policy Planning at the real State Department proposed writing a memo on the alternatives facing the Administration if its Iraq policy failed, the idea was dismissed by the department's real leadership.

The President's Iraq war is lost. Plan A—a unified and democratic Iraq that will be a model in the region—is no longer achievable. The civil war for which the Administration will not consider new responses is already at hand. Because no one in power can admit any of this, the United States is in the position of trying to hold still while the ground shifts violently underfoot. The



resistance to thinking about Plans B, C, and D means not only that this country remains stuck while Americans and Iraqis die but that its ability to affect events six or twelve months away is rapidly diminishing.

In the Brookings war game, the mock National Security Council, functioning the way the National Security Council should, responded to the deterioration in Iraq by making certain decisions, and then responded to the consequences of those decisions. By the end of the day, American policy had shifted from the President's "democracy agenda" to a focus on stabilizing Baghdad and bringing the warring parties to the conference table, to an effort to stem the flow of refugees, to a policy of countering Iranian domination of Iraq. By that point, the American forces were out of Baghdad and positioned along Iraq's borders and in Kurdistan. It was the revenge of Realpolitik. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs reminded the committee that the new policy meant greatly increased casualties among Iraqis and "a terrible loss for U.S. prestige, credibility, and legitimacy." But, in an atmosphere of critical thinking and open debate, the officials had to accept it.

Others are trying to fill the vacuum of debate from the outside. Recently, Dennis Ross, who was President Clinton's Middle East envoy, proposed in an op-ed in the *Washington Post* that the United States should negotiate its de-

parture with the Iraqi government, basing the timing and manner on whether the factions there can reach a settlement: "If Iraqis are ready to resolve their internal political differences, to adjust to reality and to make the hard choices they face, our presence can help in the transition. But if they continue to avoid reality, our presence will simply prolong both their state of denial and ours."

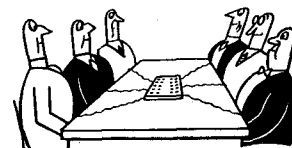
Earlier this year, Congress commissioned the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan panel chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Representative Lee Hamilton, which is looking into Iraq policy and will offer recommendations. Such is the paralysis of official Washington that the course of the war seems to be waiting for the report, which won't be released until after next month's elections. News stories suggest that it will call for changes along the lines of the Brookings war game: talk to Iran and Syria, negotiate with armed Iraqi factions in a Dayton-style conference, and, as a last resort, reduce American casualties by shifting from supporting the government in Iraq to containing the fighting.

Every one of the proposals coming from outside the real Administration starts from the assumption that its policy has failed. Plans B, C, and D are also admissions of defeat. They are an acknowledgment that our highest interests in Iraq no longer involve the welfare of

Iraqis. For anyone who had hoped that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein would bring a better life to Iraq's people, these are hard truths to accept. But they also suggest that between the President's resolve to persist in folly and the public's instinct to be rid of Iraq there is a range of choices that could prevent the disaster from inflicting permanent damage on American interests. This kind of clear, rational thought is less heartless—even, in the end, less defeatist—than willful blindness.

—George Packer

OUTSOURCING THE C.I.A.'S TRAVEL AGENT



On the official Web site of Boeing, the world's largest aerospace company, there is a section devoted to a subsidiary called Jeppesen International Trip Planning, based in San Jose, California. The write-up mentions that the division "offers everything needed for efficient, hassle-free, international flight operations," spanning the globe "from Aachen to Zhengzhou." The paragraph concludes, "Jeppesen has done it all."

Boeing does not mention, either on its Web site or in its annual report, that Jeppesen's clients include the C.I.A., and that among the international trips that the company plans for the agency are secret "extraordinary rendition" flights for terrorism suspects. Most of the planes used in rendition flights are owned and operated by tiny charter airlines that function as C.I.A. front companies, but it is not widely known that the agency has turned to a division of Boeing, the publicly traded blue-chip behemoth, to handle many of the logistical and navigational details for these trips, including flight plans, clearance to fly over other countries, hotel reservations, and ground-crew arrangements.

The Bush Administration has defended the clandestine rendition program, which began during the Clinton years, as an effective method of transporting terrorists to countries where they can be questioned or held. Human-rights activists and others have said the



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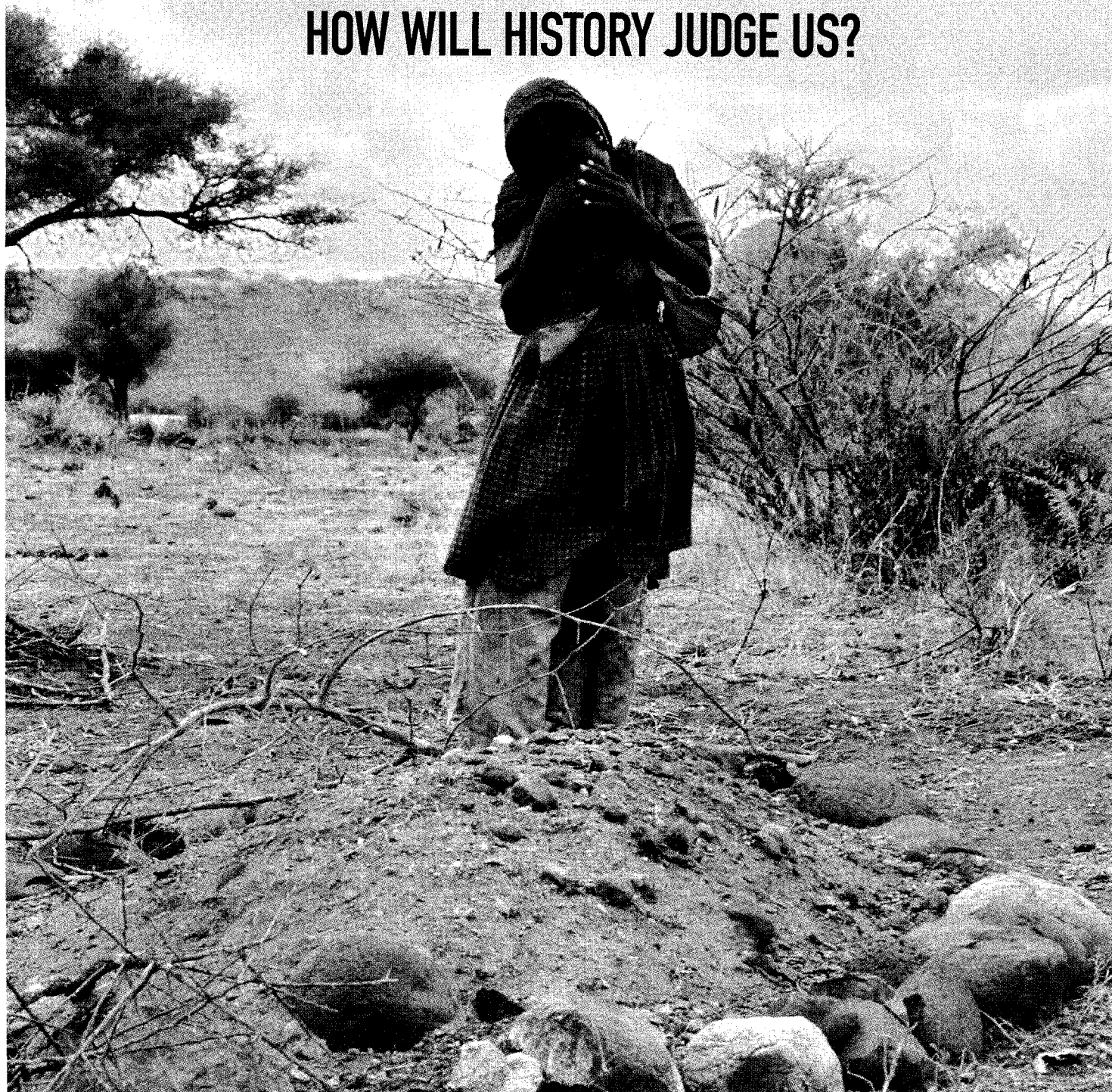


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program's primary intent is to send suspects to detention centers where they can be interrogated harshly, and have criticized it as an illegal means of "outsourcing torture."

A former Jeppesen employee, who asked not to be identified, said recently that he had been startled to learn, during an internal corporate meeting, about the company's involvement with the rendition flights. At the meeting, he recalled, Bob Overby, the managing director of Jeppesen International Trip Planning, said, "We do all of the extraordinary rendition flights—you know, the torture flights. Let's face it, some of these flights end up that way." The former employee said that another executive told him, "We do the spook flights." He was told that two of the company's trip planners were specially designated to handle renditions. He was deeply troubled by the rendition program, he said, and eventually quit his job. He recalled Overby saying, "It certainly pays well. They"—the C.I.A.—"spare no expense. They have absolutely no worry about costs. What they have to get done, they get done."

Overby, who was travelling last week, did not return several phone calls. Mike Pound, the head of corporate communications for Jeppesen, said that he would have no comment, and he added, "Bob Overby will have no comment as well." Tim Neale, the director of media relations for Boeing's corporate office in Chicago, said, "The flight-planning services we provide our customers are confidential, and we do not comment publicly on any work done for any customer without their consent." The C.I.A. had no comment.

The British journalist Stephen Grey, in a new book, "Ghost Plane," refers to documents obtained by Spanish law-enforcement officials, along with flight logs, which indicate that international flight planners provided essential logistical support for many of the C.I.A.'s renditions, including that of Khaled el-Masri, a German car salesman who was apparently mistaken for an Al Qaeda suspect with a similar name, in January of 2004. (Although documents show that Jeppesen provided this support, Grey's book does not mention the company.) Masri, who is a Muslim, was arrested at the border while crossing from Serbia into Macedonia by bus. He has

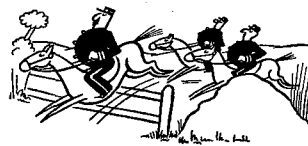
alleged in court papers that Macedonian authorities turned him over to a C.I.A. rendition team. Then, he said, masked figures stripped him naked, shackled him, and led him onto a Boeing 737 business jet. Flight plans prepared by Jeppesen show that from Skopje, Macedonia, the 737 flew to Baghdad, where it had military clearance to land, and then on to Kabul. On board, Masri has said, he was chained to the floor and injected with sedatives. After landing, he was put in the trunk of a car and driven to a building where he was placed in a dank cell. He spent the next four months there, under interrogation. Masri was released in May, 2004, on the orders of Condoleezza Rice, then the national-security adviser, after she learned that he had mistakenly been identified as a terrorism suspect.

Ben Wizner, an A.C.L.U. attorney who is representing Masri in his lawsuit against the former C.I.A. director George Tenet and private aviation companies, says that if Boeing can be proved to have played a role in Masri's rendition the A.C.L.U. may amend the lawsuit to name the company as a defendant.

The American flight crew fared better than their passenger. Documents show that after the 737 delivered Masri to the Afghan prison it flew to the resort island of Majorca, where, for two nights, crew members stayed at a luxury hotel, at taxpayers' expense.

—Jane Mayer

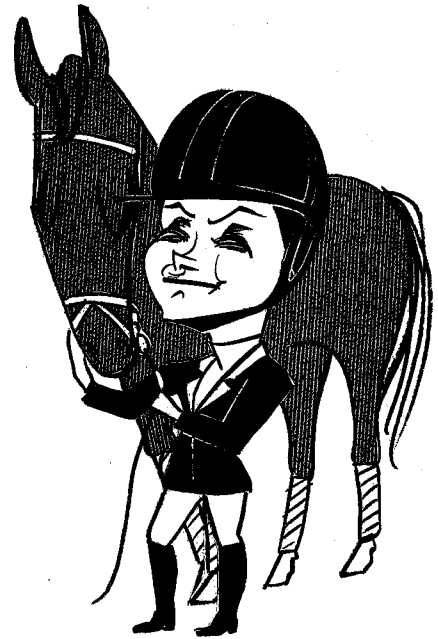
SECONDHAND DEPT. GIFT HORSE



Georgina Bloomberg, the younger of the Mayor's two daughters, has shown little interest in emulating her father's political and professional career: since girlhood, she has been devoted to things equine, and on the weekends that her father spends appearing in outer-borough ceremonial parades, she can be found competing on the professional show-jumping circuit. But the Mayor's well-known commitment to philanthropy is one to which Georgina, who is twenty-three, is gravitating. She recently

established a charitable venture called The Rider's Closet, through which she hopes to bring secondhand jodhpurs to the needy.

"My dad was redoing his house in Armonk, and I had a closet there filled with a lot of riding clothes I had grown out of," she explained the other day over a sushi lunch on the Upper West Side, not



Georgina Bloomberg

far from the Claremont Stables, where she volunteers once a week in a riding-for-the-disabled program. "It got me thinking about what people do with riding clothes if they stop riding."

A friend who participates in the intercollegiate riding program at N.Y.U. provided inspiration. (Bloomberg is enrolled at N.Y.U. She takes no classes in the spring, when the horsey set migrates to Wellington, Florida, where her father recently acquired a reported nine-million-dollar estate.) "My friend was talking about how expensive the riding clothes were," Bloomberg explained. "So I just started to think that there are all these people who have all these riding clothes they can't use anymore, and there are all these people who could use them, but no one knew how to connect the dots."

Bloomberg met with the head of the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association; as a consequence, the home she shares with her mother, in North Salem, New York, now serves as a drop-off depot for her friends' and colleagues' outgrown or

otherwise redundant riding jackets and boots. "I delivered my first boxes of clothes yesterday," she announced with pride. (They went to a facility in New Canaan that supports the riding programs at Sarah Lawrence and Fairfield University.) "I was able to take them about thirty pairs of breeches, twenty shirts, four pairs of boots, and two halters." For the moment, Bloomberg is concentrating on outfitting riders in the Northeast, but she hopes to take the program national. "Even within the show-jumping world there are people who struggle to be able to afford riding clothes, and I would love to be able to help out everybody," she said.

Riding clothes are pricey—a pair of white breeches, suitable for Grand Prix competitions, can cost more than two hundred dollars, and the dry-cleaning bills are horrendous—but Bloomberg insists that riding is not a privilege reserved for the wealthy. "It's a stereotype," she said briskly. "Yes, there are a lot of people who are wealthy in our sport; we understand that. But I have a couple of good friends who have no money. They work at a barn to be able to get a riding lesson."

Bloomberg is grateful that she has never had to work at a barn but, rather, has a barn work for her: her team in North Salem consists of seven horses, a trainer, an office manager, a work rider who exercises the horses when she is unable to do so, and four grooms. "My father pays for the horses, and he pays for school, but other than that I support myself," she said, explaining that she wins prize money—usually enough at least to cover her entrance fees—and has sponsors, including Audi. The Mayor, who has made a point of using public transportation in his capacity as a public servant, took a ride in one of the latest models as a paternal favor, and Georgina scored a new car. It will not, apparently, be an absolute necessity: a Lexus, with driver, was waiting for her outside the Claremont Stables, with a pair of strappy sandals stowed on the rear seat ready to substitute for her mud-caked sneakers.

Bloomberg, who is studying art and sports management, believes that an imaginative public-relations effort could change the misperception that riding is an elitist activity. "A lot of people don't think show jumping is a sport, but look at

the way Nascar has become a huge sport now on ESPN," she said. "If you can make cars seem interesting, I think you can do the same for show jumping." She suggested that a reality show could be built around a rider's preparation for the next Olympic trials, and added that she would be willing to be the star of such a show should a producer want to make it. In the meantime, she admits to enjoying her first taste of worthy entrepreneurship. "I don't know anything about tax returns or anything like that, but I do know what to do with the horsey crowd," she said. "And this is very satisfying. It's the first time I have set my mind to something, and gone out and accomplished it on my own, and no one else has helped me."

—Rebecca Mead

DEPT. OF DEMOGRAPHICS WORST NIGHTMARES



"No one's really afraid of Frankenstein," Timothy Haskell said the other day. Last Halloween, Haskell, a theatre director, staged a public haunted house on the Lower East Side, and so many people showed up that hundreds never made it inside. "We realized that we had to turn away a lot of local people," Haskell said. So this year he put up haunted houses in all five boroughs, tailored to prey on the fears peculiar to each one.

For months, Haskell and his crew polled residents of the five boroughs to find out their worst nightmares. A few days before opening, Haskell was putting the finishing touches on the Manhattan installation (the haunted houses are called "Nightmare: Face Your Fear"), on Suffolk Street, along with his chief designer, Paul Smithyman. Although the polling process did not adhere to scientific standards, Haskell, who lives in Brooklyn and is most scared of getting stuck in a cave, and Smithyman, an Englishman, who is afraid of being eaten alive, had ventured to draw a few conclusions. People from the Bronx and Queens, they said, tend to fear things that might actually happen, like being mugged (harpaxophobia), while Man-

hattanites are frightened of fantastical and unlikely occurrences (flying sharks, riding in an elevator that rockets through the roof of a building). "In Manhattan and Brooklyn, we heard 'fear of the homeless,'" Smithyman said. "Then, in the Bronx, we heard 'fear of becoming homeless.'" Staten Island residents apparently dread chemical spills and gas leaks.

Once the answers were compiled, the team members sat down together to figure out how to translate residents' fears into low-budget theatrical scenarios. Most of the joke answers (the Mister Softee jingle, "my mother-in-law") were discarded, and others were grouped together under general rubrics. You can't base an entire room on one person's fear of tuna fish, but if you pool all the answers having to do with unpleasant foods—sour milk, rotten eggs—and group them under the heading sitophobia, or the fear of eating, you have a formidably creepy room: the Brooklyn haunted house features a woman who is forced to eat her own intestines. A few people from Brooklyn said they were frightened of Howdy Doody, but they were lumped in with the residents, evident in every borough, who suffer from pedophobia, or "fear of the false representation of sentient beings." For them, the organizers rounded up about eighty dummies, which lurk spookily in dark corners in each of the five haunted houses.

The challenge of creating a tableau representing acrophobia, the fear of heights (and the seventh most common fear of Manhattan residents), almost stumped the designers. "One idea was that we'd have people walk up a staircase and onto a Plexiglas floor and see teenytiny furniture beneath them," Haskell said. "But there were liability issues." Instead, they paired a video of someone falling off a ledge with an evocative sound effect: *vroooooooooom, splat*. For illyngophobia (fear of dizziness, No. 11 among Manhattanites), the team installed a giant spinning tunnel; for entomophobia (insects, No. 3), they glued a thousand dead cockroaches onto a wall; and for musophobia (mice, No. 6), they ordered an essence of dead rat from an outfit in Chicago called Sinister Scents. In every borough, it seems, both fear of insects and fear of rodents trump thanatophobia, the fear of death.

—Michael Schulman

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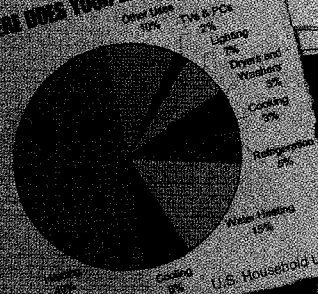
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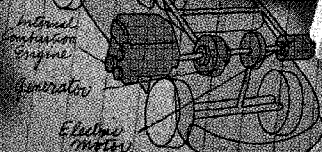
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Human energy

THE FINANCIAL PAGE SAFE AS HOUSES?

In the past few months, it's been almost all bad news for the housing market. Homebuilders have had to tell Wall Street that between twenty and thirty per cent of their contracts have been cancelled. Janet Yellen, the head of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, has said that streets full of unsold new homes now make parts of Phoenix and Las Vegas look like "ghost towns." Selling a home takes longer than it used to, and the inventory of existing homes for sale has gone up almost forty per cent in the past year. Yet, through it all, one fact has continued to provide solace to anxious homeowners and real-estate brokers alike: housing prices have stayed remarkably stable.

The lesson we're supposed to take from this is that a home remains as solid and safe an investment as ever. After all, we're constantly told, you have to go back to the Great Depression to find a full year in which housing prices fell. Unfortunately, the numbers upon which these comforting conclusions depend—namely, median home prices for the country—are unreliable and misleading.

There are plenty of statistics available about the housing market, but median home prices, which are tracked by both the National Association of Realtors and the Census Bureau, are what typically make headlines. They seem to tell buyers and sellers exactly what they want to know: how much the one has to spend, how much the other stands to make. The N.A.R. says that median sale prices for existing homes have risen fifty-seven per cent since 2000, and in many markets the increase has been much bigger than that.

Although these numbers come from an association that has a vested interest in making the housing market look healthy, they do provide a roughly accurate picture of how housing prices have behaved in the past six years. But if you're trying to figure out what kind of investment housing is—what rewards you can expect and what risks you'll run—median prices become a lot less useful. In the first place, the data don't adjust for improvements in

quality. People have been building bigger homes—the typical new home is about twenty-five per cent bigger than it was twenty years ago—and putting money into improvements like central air-conditioning, home theatres, and pools. And the impact of quality adjustments isn't trivial; a study of home prices between 1977 and 2003 found that adjusting for quality reduced the return to homeowners by forty per cent.

As for the much vaunted statistic about housing prices never falling for a full year since the Depression? That's true only if you forget about inflation. When you adjust for it, you find long stretches when housing prices tumbled and then stayed low for years; nationally,



real home prices were actually eight per cent lower in 1991 than they were in 1979. What makes the problem worse is that sellers have recently been offering buyers huge incentives, ranging from granite counters to free cars and, in some cases, large rebates. These are, in fact, price cuts, but they never make it into the data.

Then, there's the problem of sample bias. When you hear that housing prices in a city have gone up, you assume that all the homes in the city have become more valuable. But the numbers reflect only the homes that were actually sold in a given month, and, if more of those homes happen to be expensive, it'll make the market as a whole look strong even if it's really quite weak. This is what leads

to the curious phenomenon of median prices rising even as the number of sales is plummeting and the backlog of houses on the market is soaring.

Because nominal median prices compare completely different groups of homes (all those sold in August, 2005, say, and all those sold in August, 2006), they can overstate how much prices go up during booms and understate how much they go down during busts. Luckily, there are other measures we can use. For example, the government compiles one index that tracks the repeat sales of homes that have mortgages with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and another index that measures new-home sales while controlling for quality. The economist Robert Shiller, meanwhile, has created an index that controls for quality by tracking repeated sales of the same houses over more than a century. Together, these numbers give us a better picture of what happens to housing prices over time. And though they show that housing prices have risen sharply in the past decade, they also show that, over the longer haul, investing in a home is far from a sure thing; if you control for inflation and quality, Shiller found, real home prices barely budged between the eighteen-nineties and the nineteen-nineties. The idea that housing prices have nowhere to go but up is, in other words, a statistical illusion.

It's an illusion, though, that has powerful effects. Clearly, it encouraged the speculative buying of the past few years. And it has also made sellers remarkably hesitant to cut prices, which has led to the huge backlog of unsold properties. Eventually, sellers are bound to realign their expectations with reality by trimming their asking prices. That will hurt people who were fooled into reckless speculation by assurances that investing in houses offered risk-free rewards. For most people, however, a decline in prices needn't be so painful. If you're planning to sell your home and buy another one, an over-all decline in housing prices leaves you no poorer than before. And, if you're staying in your home, a drop in value can actually make things easier by lowering property taxes and insurance costs. Look at the bright side: at least you've got a roof over your head.

—James Surowiecki

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SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

The strangest Senate race of the year.

BY PETER J. BOYER

*The controversies surrounding George Allen eclipsed James Webb's campaign.*

The autumn political contest in Virginia began this year as it always does, with a Labor Day parade and festival in the Shenandoah Valley town of Buena Vista. The event featured appearances by the Democratic governor, Tim Kaine, and his predecessor, Mark Warner, another Democrat, who was then considering running for President in 2008. Senator George Allen, a Republican, who was also contemplating a Presidential race, rode the parade route on a jumpy horse called Bubba, and forecast a victory in his current reelection campaign. Notably missing from the event was Allen's Democratic opponent, James Webb. To the consternation of some on his team, he had skipped the ritual open-

ing of his first political campaign in favor of a private ritual, three hundred miles away.

At Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, members of the 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, were preparing for deployment to Iraq. Among them was Webb's only son, Lance Corporal James R. Webb, known as Jimmy. Two years earlier, Jimmy had interrupted his studies at Penn State and enlisted. His father could hardly protest; Jimmy was taking up the challenge posed by Webb in countless speeches, books, and articles. To Webb, himself once a distinguished member of the Marine Corps, military service was not just a patriotic gesture but part of a test of honor

and courage, an essential rite of passage.

Webb had gone to Vietnam in 1969, unburdened by ambivalence at a time when the narrative of the Vietnam War had turned irretrievably toward tragedy. His first novel, "Fields of Fire," published in 1978, was based on the war—"the finest of the Vietnam novels," according to Tom Wolfe—and Vietnam continued to be his point of reference, to the degree that even his friends wondered whether it had distorted his perspective. But Webb was shaped not so much by the war as by what he discovered when he returned.

The year 1969 was one of the bloodiest for Americans in Vietnam, with the weekly death toll averaging about two hundred and twenty-five. At home, it was the year of Woodstock, the takeover of the Harvard administration building by student radicals, the trial of the Chicago Eight, and the huge National Moratorium antiwar protest. It was also the year that President Richard Nixon used the term "silent majority" to describe those Americans who did not protest.

When Webb, debilitated by shrapnel wounds received in an action that earned him the Navy Cross, was forced to retire from the military, he enrolled at the Georgetown University Law Center, and stepped directly into the culture divide. He hated his time at Georgetown, largely because of his encounter with an attitude that caught him wholly unaware. It seemed to him that many of his classmates had been untouched by Vietnam (except for a gain in self-regard, accrued from opposition to what they deemed an immoral war). Webb concluded that they not only had figured out ways to avoid the risk and sacrifice of military service but had convinced themselves, as they proceeded along their education and career tracks, that theirs was the true heroism of the time. Inspired by his rage, he decided to write "Fields of Fire," which included a series of withering cameo portrayals of Ivy League graduates who worked the system to avoid service. "Some day he will write speeches for great politicians," he wrote of one character. "Tim Forbes will confess his boondoggle, and we will admire his honesty. He only did what everybody else was doing." Webb could recite the minuscule number of men killed in Vietnam who, by his count, had matriculated at the elite colleges (Harvard, twelve;

STEVE BRODNER

Princeton, six; M.I.T., two) compared with the vast numbers from public schools.

Webb returned to the subject repeatedly in his writing over the next twenty-five years, until he produced what amounted to his own ethnology. He saw himself as a creature of a pervasive but nearly invisible Scots-Irish subculture, descended from the warrior clans of Ulster who migrated to North America in large numbers in the eighteenth century. They came to live mostly in the Appalachian South—a stubborn, bellicose people, fiercely individualistic and egalitarian. They settled the frontiers, invented country music, and fostered a truly native form of American democracy. Most important, they bore the brunt of fighting the nation's wars. In 2004, Webb published "Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America." He had found, he believed, the DNA of red-state America.

In Webb's world, manhood was a standing, to be earned. When he was a small boy, his father, a bomber pilot in the Second World War, would clench his fist and dare his son to strike it, taunting him to keep punching until the tears flowed. But Webb accepted that a father's highest duty was to prepare his son for manhood by teaching him to fight, to hunt, and to handle a weapon. He got his first gun when he was eight, and Jimmy did, too. In such a culture, going off to war is part of what Webb calls "the Red-neck Bar Mitzvah."

During the week before Jimmy's deployment, Webb and his son were joined by José Ramirez, a former marine who is the boyfriend of Jimmy's sister Sarah, and Dale Wilson, a member of Webb's platoon in Vietnam, who is a triple amputee. Just before the departure of the transport bus that was taking the marines to the airfield from which they would leave for Kuwait, Jimmy and his father and their friends gathered in the parking lot. Webb had filled a Coke bottle with whiskey, which he poured into four cups. The three older men raised their cups to Jimmy, who offered the final toast: "To those who went before me. And to those who didn't come back. Now it's my time."

That afternoon, Webb, who is sixty, returned to Virginia, where he is running as an antiwar candidate, under the ban-

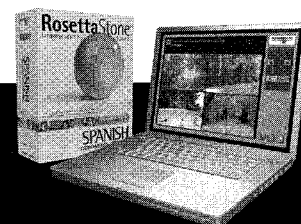
ner of the party of Hillary Clinton and the former protester John Kerry, whose handshake he refused for twenty years.

The unifying theme of Webb's fiction, his popular history of the Scots-Irish, and, especially, his opinion journalism has been that of put-upon people (the military, Southerners, white men) suffering the smug disregard of a hostile elite. In the Webb reckoning, much blame resides in nineteen-sixties-era liberalism, which has influenced the Democratic Party for a generation. That he now finds himself a Democratic candidate in a pivotal U.S. Senate race is a development that proceeds, by its own stubborn logic, from this insistent theme. Webb's candidacy is partly a quest to reclaim the Democratic Party for what he sees as a natural constituency.

When Webb deployed to Vietnam as a raw second lieutenant, in 1969, he had no particular political leanings. His mission was to protect the tactical space in front of him, and to bring back as many of his men as possible. Returning home, he felt that he and others like him had been driven from a Democratic Party that had, he believed, sacrificed a broad populist tradition to the passions of the intemperate margins. Webb proved to be a natural polemicist. He denounced "the ones who fled" the war, and inveighed against the acts of the Watergate Congress, which, elected after Richard Nixon's disgrace, in 1974, halted funding to South Vietnam, hastening its doom. (The plight of the Vietnamese boat people came to have particular meaning for Webb. A girl named Hong Le was among those fished from the water by the U.S. Navy and transported to this country. She became a lawyer, practicing in Washington, and a year ago she became Webb's third wife. She travels with him on the campaign trail, and is expecting their first child in December.) Webb declared Jimmy Carter's blanket pardoning of draft resisters a rank betrayal and an abuse of Presidential power. When President Clinton left office, he wrote, "It is a pleasurable experience to watch Bill Clinton finally being judged, even by his own party, for the ethical fraudulence that has characterized his entire political career."

Webb reserved a good portion of his pique for the "activist Left and cultural

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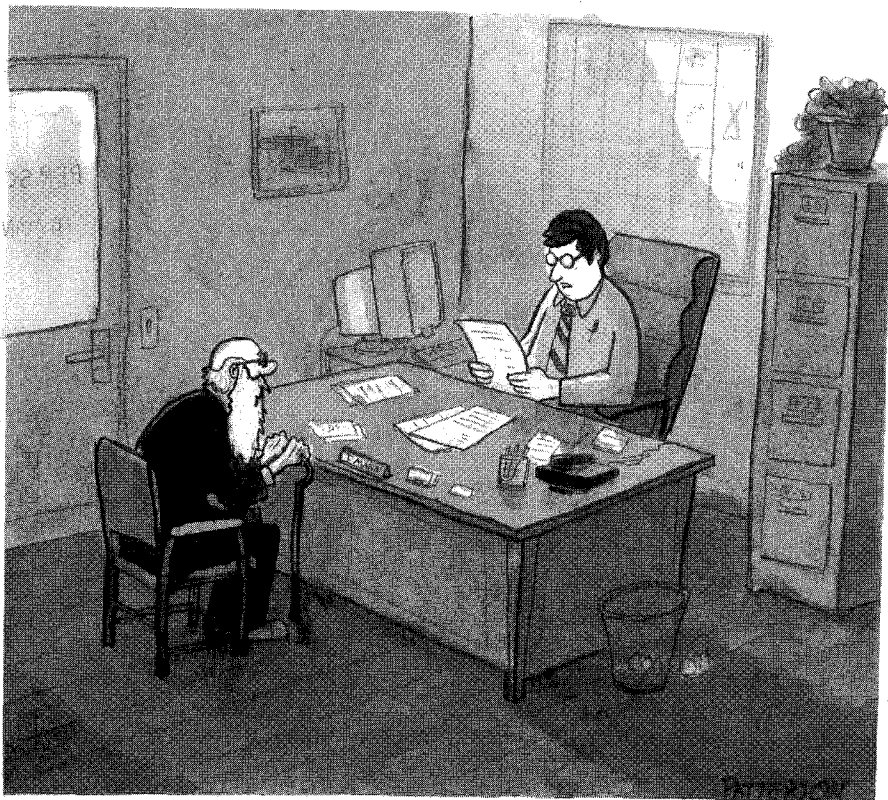
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"Any experience?"

Marxists" and their efforts to effect "what might be called the collectivist taming of America, symbolized by the edicts of political correctness." He saw the Pentagon's prolonged investigation of the Navy Tailhook sexual-abuse scandal in the nineteen-nineties as a political witch hunt, driven by a radical-feminist agenda to undermine the masculine culture of the military. Affirmative action, he posited, quickly became a means of victimizing white men through "state-sponsored racism."

In "Born Fighting," Webb developed the thesis that has become the rationale for his Senate run. Democrats, he argued, had foolishly written off the Southern white male, in the mistaken belief that it was a necessary cost of the Party's leadership in the civil-rights era. Southern rednecks thus became a convenient symbol of all that impeded progress. "And for the last fifty years," he wrote, "the Left has been doing everything in its power to sue them, legislate against their interests, mock them in the media, isolate them as idiosyncratic, and publicly humiliate their traditions in order to make them, at best, irrelevant to Ameri-

ca's future growth." In alienating the South, Democrats ceded the region to Republican strategists, who took the trouble to cater to its culture. Webb, who had been a nominal Democrat in his youth, knew this from personal experience. According to Robert Timberg's book "The Nightingale's Song," Webb was recruited into the Reagan Administration by a Republican official who had once heard him being interviewed on the radio. The interviewer, talking to Webb about "Fields of Fire," mentioned that Jane Fonda was in town and asked Webb whether he might wish to meet her. "Jane Fonda can kiss my ass," Webb replied. "I wouldn't go across the street to watch her slit her wrist." The Republican official, John Herrington, who later became Reagan's personnel chief, championed Webb's appointment, in 1984, as Reagan's Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs and, in 1987, as Secretary of the Navy.

Webb also believes from experience that the Republican hold on the South is not unshakable. His own political remigration began when he was working on "Born Fighting" and realized that

his culture's natural home is the party of Andrew Jackson. His people don't hate the government; they hate governmental intrusion. It is the government's job to build dams and highways, not the perfect society.

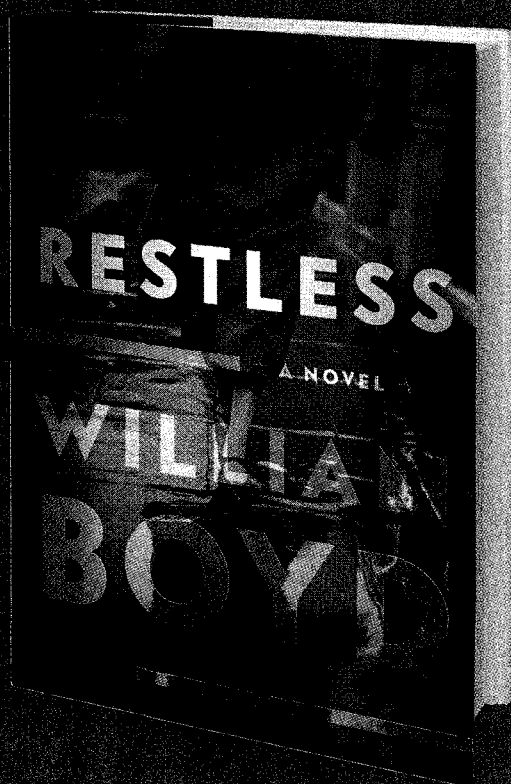
"It's a bottom-up culture that has been manipulated," he told me one day. "Really, that's one of the big reasons that I decided to go ahead and do this—test the theory, because I believe it."

This is, of course, a thought that has occurred to other Democrats. It's what Howard Dean was trying to get at in 2003, while campaigning for the Presidency, when he said, in a characteristic display of unfortunate phrasing, "I still want to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks." Dean's point (and Webb's) is that Democrats cannot succeed in the South until the Party broadens its tent, becoming less insistent on such matters of current Party orthodoxy as abortion, gun control, and gay marriage. "You know, it's been a hard thing to get through the heads of many Democrats," Webb says. "They have to rethink a piece of something that's become fundamental to them, which has hurt them in ways they don't understand."

Webb's campaign adviser David (Mudcat) Saunders recalls a revealing exchange he had last spring at a retreat for Democratic senators in Philadelphia. "I had a very prominent U.S. senator come up to me and say, 'Mudcat, why are your people so stupid that they would vote against their own economic self-interest?' And I replied, 'Listen, we do vote against our own economic self-interest. We do that. But you say it's stupid. Do you ever consider that there might be a powerful force at work, and that it's driving these people to vote against their economic self-interest? I'm telling you, it's there. It's called culture.'"

Webb, who is licensed to carry a pistol, and whose campaign vehicles include a camouflaged Jeep, will not be mistaken by voters for Howard Dean—or for George Allen. No Southerner could confuse his strenuous opposition to the Iraq war with the reflexive antiwar attitude perceived by many in the South as a partisan wish for American failure. Before the first Gulf war, he testified in a 1990 Senate hearing that taking down Saddam Hussein's regime would destabilize the region and empower Iran; he main-

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tained that position through the interwar decade, and points to the current situation as vindication of his view. He believes that the American military is fundamentally unsuited to a long-term occupation. ("It doesn't make a lot of sense to turn the greatest maneuver force in the world into one going around defending police stations.") But he does not advocate a sudden coalition pullout, or even a firm timetable for the withdrawal of troops. Rather, he argues for convening a conference of regional players, including Syria and Iran, and getting them invested in finding a resolution for Iraq. At some point, he says, American forces could be repositioned in nearby countries like Jordan and Kuwait, where they would be able to combat terrorism in Iraq with less American exposure.

On domestic matters, Webb's Democratic populism borrows from the "two Americas" theme that John Edwards struck during his Vice-Presidential campaign, emphasizing the widening gap between the very rich and everyone else. Webb urges strong border security, including the construction of a fence, coupled with strict enforcement of laws that will supposedly stop corporate exploitation of cheap illegal labor. He opposes the free-trade agreements ("Free trade is not fair trade"), and in this and other regards (such as his disdain for neoconservatives: "These guys are so far to the left you think they're on the right. It's right out of the Communist International—exporting ideology at the point of a gun") he almost seems a Pat Buchanan conservative. "I've been saying for a couple of years that we're going through a sea change, where the old labels just don't apply," he told me. "What does it mean to be a liberal? What does it mean to be a conservative?" (For Webb, the ambiguity meant that in Virginia's 1994 Senate race he endorsed the Democrat Chuck Robb over the Republican Oliver North; he then backed George Allen over Robb in 2000; and now he was running against Allen for that same seat.)

Webb's campaign is working hard to portray him as the kind of Democrat Ronald Reagan could trust. Webb's first television ad, called "Gipper," opened with a shot of Reagan giving the 1985 commencement address at the United

States Naval Academy. "One man who sat where you do now," Reagan told the cadets, "is another member of our Administration, Assistant Secretary of Defense James Webb—the most decorated member of his class." Black-and-white photographs of a young Webb in uniform filled the screen, with Reagan's voice narrating. "James' gallantry as a Marine officer in Vietnam won him the Navy Cross and other decorations."

An announcer's voice then intoned: "Soldier. Scholar. Leader. Now Jim Webb is running for Senate." Nowhere in the ad was the word "Democrat" mentioned.

When Webb's pollster, Pete Brodnitz, saw the ad, he said, "This is gonna make

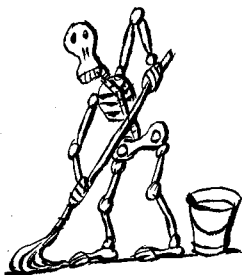
George Allen's head explode." Indeed, the Allen camp put a letter of protest from Nancy Reagan on its Web site and demanded that Webb take the ad off the air. Webb just laughed and said, "If George Allen can find a video of Ronald Reagan praising him, he's welcome to use it." The controversy guaranteed free airtime for the commercial in news broadcasts, and had precisely the effect that the Webb camp had hoped for. With the campaign entering its final stretch, the Democrat and the Republican were arguing over who had the greater claim to the legacy of Ronald Reagan.

To George Allen's critics, there is something manifestly ridiculous about his public personality—his cowboy boots and hat, his "howdy's and 'y'all's, his lip pack of Copenhagen snuff and his spit cup. Allen, the son of the great football coach George Allen, Sr., grew up in Palos Verdes, California, a prosperous suburb of Los Angeles, and he did not move to Virginia until he was in college, when his father became the coach of the Washington Redskins. "WILL SEN. ALLEN'S COWBOY BOOTS FIT VIRGINIA VOTERS?" was the question asked recently in a *Washington Post* headline, over a story noting that Virginia "is far from cowboy country." The *Post* article, citing Allen "detractors" (Jim Webb's campaign strategist Steve Jarding), suggested, in an interrogatory tone, what liberal bloggers have long been declaring in the affirmative: George Allen is trying to fool voters into believing that he's a gen-

uine country boy. A corollary irritant is the prospect that Allen might succeed in posing as his political hero, Ronald Reagan—or, more maddening, that he might even be another Reagan.

As Allen entered the race for a second term in the Senate, his reelection was considered a foregone conclusion. The bigger question in political circles was his positioning as a contender for the 2008 Republican Presidential nomination. Allen, a popular governor of Virginia, who served from 1994 until 1998, had been remarkably successful in passing his conservative agenda—including welfare reform, required achievement standards in the public schools, the right to carry concealed weapons, and the abolition of prison parole—even though the state legislature was controlled by Democrats. He has shown a formidable talent for electoral politics; he was the only Senate candidate to defeat a Democratic incumbent (Robb) in 2000, and, as chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, he helped engineer a Republican gain in 2004, which included the defeat of the Senate Minority Leader, Tom Daschle. By the conventional calculations of Presidential politics, Allen's record of conservative orthodoxy automatically made him a favorite in a nominating process that, in both parties, favors orthodoxy. A team of national political consultants, including Mary Matalin, had already signed on.

Such calculations matter, but so does personal chemistry—and that is where the association with Reagan applies. The cowboy-pol image, with its implied bedrock conservatism, is best presented in a sunny package. Reagan (who was born above a bank in Tampico, Illinois, a locale also far from cowboy country) was blessed with a natural amiability, and much of Allen's success in Virginia can be attributed to his determined good cheer and his slow, easy manner of speaking, the pauses always filled with a smile. It was true that his partisan rhetoric could sometimes get harsh (as when he declared, at a state Republican convention in 1994, "My friends . . . let's enjoy knocking their soft teeth down their whining throats"), but that could be written off as a vestige of an upbringing in a football environment. Astride his horse at the Labor Day parade, Allen was pressed by a reporter about the political wisdom of his cowboy routine during election sea-



son. He was wearing a hat, he said, because it was raining. Besides, he added, "kids like horses." It sounded almost like something Reagan would say.

It is precisely because geniality is an essential component of the George Allen proposition that a casual remark, tossed off at a lazy August campaign stop in a remote corner of Virginia, threatened to become his undoing.

Allen was addressing an outdoor gathering at the Breaks Interstate Park, near the Kentucky border. This is Allen country, staunchly conservative, and he was imploring his supporters to "motivate" for the stretch run when he was distracted by a ubiquitous presence. It was S. R. Sidarth, a twenty-year-old University of Virginia student, and a summer volunteer for the Webb campaign, who worked as a Webb "tracker"—following Allen along the campaign trail with a digital camcorder, hoping to capture some word or deed that might embarrass the Senator. (Allen has a tracker on Webb, too.) Chatting casually, his sleeves rolled up, Allen

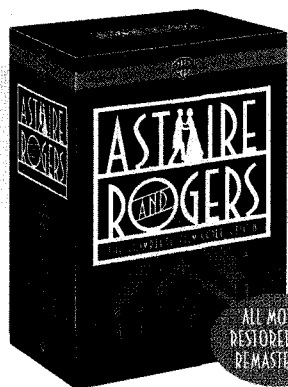
gestured toward Sidarth and introduced him to the crowd. "This fellow here, over here, with the yellow shirt," Allen said, "Macaca, or whatever his name is, he's with my opponent. He's following us around everywhere. And it's just great! We're going to places all over Virginia, and he's having it on film, and it's great to have you here, and you show it to your opponent"—presumably, he meant to say "candidate"—"because he's never been there and probably will never come." At this, there were cheers from the crowd, who understood that Allen was implicitly associating Webb with the urban liberals of the national Democratic Party. Recalling that Webb was in California, raising money, Allen turned again to Sidarth, and said, "His opponent"—again, meaning Webb—"actually, right now, is with a bunch of Hollywood movie moguls." Alluding, perhaps, to Webb's screenwriting ventures, Allen said, "We care about fact, not fiction. So, welcome, let's give a welcome to Macaca here. Welcome to America, and the real world of Virginia."

If Allen had any clue about what he'd just done, he didn't show it. Smiling, he turned from Sidarth and resumed his stump speech: "My friends, we're in the midst of a war on terror."

The Webb campaign had no trouble recognizing the opportunity presented by Allen's utterance. The incident occurred on a Friday. On Monday, Webb's staff posted Sidarth's video on YouTube, and mass-mailed the link to journalists and supporters. The next day, the Washington *Post* published a page-one story, the first of more than three dozen articles mentioning "Macaca" that the paper ran in the course of a month. The rest of the national press quickly followed, as did the television comedians, talk radio, and bloggers. "Macaca," a word that few Americans surely had ever heard, became the signature of the political season.

Three weeks later, Webb pulled into Roanoke at the end of a long day on the road to address supporters at the opening of his local campaign headquarters. He told them that the campaign accommo-

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dations (provided without charge by Mudcat Saunders, the landlord) were much nicer than the condemned building he was using in Arlington—a reminder that his campaign was continuing to struggle in the money race. But he also delivered some good news, which he'd learned that day. Earlier in the summer, he had trailed Allen by sixteen points; a new poll showed that the race had become a statistical dead heat.

I had accompanied Webb on the last leg of his journey to Roanoke, and as we made our way through the smoky rises and falls of the Blue Ridge he reflected on how his ancestors had crossed those mountains, after fleeing Ireland, only to take up new fights against new enemies—the Indians, the British, the Yankees, the Germans, the Vietcong. Webb's ruddy pugnacity does not easily accommodate the joviality demanded by his new calling in politics. He can arrive at a campaign event looking as if he were ready to leave, and he hardly disguises his dislike of the glad-handing, the bargaining, and, especially, the begging for money. At a campaign rally in Alexandria last month, he was preceded at the lectern by Jim Moran, a congressman who is a Massachusetts transplant and the consummate Irish pol, and who said of Webb, "I have to tell you, he's not all that comfortable in a political environment." He added, "But it's because he's genuine, he's real."

Moran was followed by Barack Obama,

who spoke without consulting notes and cited Newt Gingrich's recommendation that the Democrats adopt the slogan "Had enough?" Obama continued, "Now, I don't quote Newt all the time, but I've got to say, ol' Newt is on to something right here. I don't know about you, but I have had enough of a can't do, won't do, won't even try style of government that we've been seeing in Washington." As Obama elaborated on the Administration's excesses and failures, the crowd took up the antiphonal chant and began cheering almost rapturously.

Then Webb stepped to the lectern. He praised Obama for the power of his words, and began reading, somewhat stiffly, his own speech—a carefully written address that included the observation "You know, back in another century, people like Marx and Engels talked about man being cut away from his land, his agricultural roots, and all the angst that followed from that. You know, today we risk being cut away from our government, from our democracy. The slash-and-burn politics of the Karl Rove era have too often obscured the real issues for America."

Bill Connelly, Jr., a politics professor at Washington and Lee University, in Lexington, Virginia, observes, "He looks like somebody who's making his first serious run for public office. He doesn't ask for votes. He's got to ask. There's an intimacy in local politics that is expected. Part of George Allen's appeal is that he's this down-home country guy with cow-



"Take my coffee—it's worth five dollars."

boy boots, chewing tobacco, glad-handing—a down-to-earth guy. Retail politics matters, and Webb is not as good at it.”

But Webb did have one apparent edge—a warrior profile at a moment when the electorate was unnerved by Iraq and remained uncertain of the Democrats’ ability to take charge of national-security matters. The Webb campaign’s strategy had been to run a race reflecting his biography, his sense of command. “We want the whole thing being about leadership,” Pete Brodnitz, the campaign’s pollster, said. The “Gipper” ad introduced Virginians to the Jim Webb who is still so highly regarded by his former platoon members that his radioman, Mac McGarvey (who lost his right arm in Vietnam), moved in with him for the duration of the campaign, working as his driver.

With George Allen’s considerable advantage in amiability neutralized by the “Macaca” gaffe, there was a chance to move the focus of the contest to Webb. Instead, the campaign took an even weirder turn, which effectively pushed Webb off the stage. George Allen’s family history became the only story.

By mid-September, a month after Allen had welcomed “Macaca” Sidarth to “the real world of Virginia,” the word still held a powerful fascination, its etymology probed, its sound repeated, until it assumed an odd familiarity in political discourse. The controversy meshed neatly with another lingering problem for Allen—his alleged racial insensitivity, deriving from a youthful interest in the Old Confederacy. It was reported last spring that Allen wore a Confederate pin in a high-school photograph, and that he’d once kept a Rebel battle flag in his home office. Now his use of a term seen as a slur seemed to confirm the suspicions of those willing to believe that he was a racist.

“Macaca” was still very much in the air when, on September 18th, Allen and Webb arrived at a Fairfax County hotel for a debate. The large ballroom was packed with members of the Chamber of Commerce, reporters, and political partisans. One of the debate panelists, a local television reporter named Peggy Fox, was dubious about Allen’s claim that he hadn’t intended to insult Sidarth and had invented the word on the spot. “But the

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"Parade? What parade?"

RAE

word is a racial slur in French-influenced African nations, most notably Tunisia," Fox said. "Your mother's Tunisian. Are you *sure* you never heard the word?" No, Allen replied, he hadn't, and he apologized once again.

But Fox had opened another discomfiting line of inquiry—Allen's heritage on his mother's side. "It has been reported that her father, your grandfather Felix, whom you were given your middle name for, was Jewish," Fox said. "Could you please tell us whether your forebears include Jews"—there was a collective gasp in the room—"and, if so, at which point Jewish identity might have ended?"

The matter of Allen's ethnicity has lurked at the edges of his political career, largely because he has occasionally repeated a story that his mother, a French national who spent her childhood in North Africa, told him and his siblings: that her family had been hounded by the Nazis, and that her father, Felix Lumbroso, had been seized in the night and taken to prison. In August, the New York-based Jewish weekly *The Forward* published an article, by E. J. Kessler, revealing that the Lumbrosos were prominent Sephardic Jews in Tunisia; Felix Lumbroso, a wine importer, was

also well known in the Sephardic community in France.

Allen had not discussed the matter with Kessler, and he physically recoiled at Fox's question. The audience booed her for asking it. After lecturing Fox on the First Amendment, Allen demanded, "I would like to ask you, why is that relevant, my religion, Jim's religion, or the religious beliefs of anyone out here?"

That got cheers, but Allen's ethnicity became the next pressing issue of the campaign. The bloggers and the opinion writers questioned his apparent bemusement on the subject, and wondered whether he was trying to hide his Jewishness. "If it was discovered that Allen knew this family history, but attempted to keep it under wraps for whatever reason, it could do great harm to any political campaign," John Mercurio, an analyst with the political tip sheet *Hotline*, said.

Overnight, Allen was transformed from a closet Confederate to a self-hating Jew. And things grew stranger still.

Having stumbled after "Macaca," Allen now acted quickly. He issued a statement declaring, "I embrace and take great pride in every aspect of my diverse heritage, including my Lumbroso family

line's Jewish heritage, which I learned about from a recent magazine article and my mother confirmed." He indicated that he had not owned up to his Jewishness at the debate earlier that week out of respect for his mother's privacy. (He also told a reporter for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "I still had a ham sandwich for lunch.") And then Allen made a remarkable appearance on CNN's political show "Situation Room," with the anchor, Wolf Blitzer, playing the role of Oprah. Allen told of visiting his mother in California in August and confronting her with the story of their family that had been laid out in *The Forward*.

"I was with my mother across the table," he said. "And I asked her. I said, 'You know, there's these rumors flying around here that you're Jewish or, you know, Jewish bloodlines and so forth.' And I asked her, 'Is this—is there anything to this?' And I saw her reaction. And she said, 'Yes, there are.' And I said, 'Well, why didn't you ever tell?' 'I didn't want to tell you. Do you love me? You won't love me as much.' I said, 'Oh, Ma, why would that make—I love you even more. I respect you even more.' When I heard of why she had hid this, for fear of retribution, of stigma, and how that would harm not just her but my father and her children—she was protecting her children. And I said, 'Well, Ma, this just doesn't matter. You know, the Nazis are gone. And it just doesn't matter.'"

Allen has now claimed to embrace his Jewish identity. His discovery, he told Blitzer, had lent him new purpose. "I have been a leader for fighting against anti-Semitism and intolerance," he said. "But now it's personal. And I'm going to use my time here on Earth to continue to fight for freedom and justice, and to make sure intolerance never rears its ugly head in this country or anywhere else in the world."

But Allen was immediately confronted by another surprise. On September 24th, the online magazine *Salon* published a story in which a former teammate of Allen's on the University of Virginia football team alleged that the young Allen had been a rank racist who routinely used the term "nigger." The teammate, a North Carolina radiologist named Ken Shelton, also told a bizarre story of a long-ago hunting trip with Allen. After the hunt-

ing party killed a doe, Shelton said, Allen severed the dead animal's head and stuffed it in the mailbox of an African-American family.

The *Times* and the *Washington Post* quickly picked up the story, adding a new allegation. Christopher Taylor, now a professor at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, said he'd once visited Allen's farm and was shocked by something Allen said. The two men had been discussing the problematically large population of turtles in Allen's pond, Taylor claimed, when he asked Allen why he didn't just kill the turtles and eat them. "We don't eat them," Allen was quoted as replying. "The niggers eat them."

Allen again issued angry denials ("ludicrously false"), and his former wife, Anne Waddell, was among those who came forward to defend him. Yes, she said, Taylor had visited the farm, and there were turtles who fed on the Allens' beloved goslings. She herself had fished the predatory turtles from the pond. "The person who ate the turtles," she said, "was our neighbor."

Allen now made appearances with African-American leaders; he spoke of his own awakening on racial matters on a pilgrimage to the civil-rights battlefields, such as Selma; he apologized so thoroughly for his misunderstanding of the pain caused by the symbols of the Confederacy that the Sons of Confederate Veterans demanded their own apology from him.

The common wisdom in the political commentariat was that George Allen was finished, at least as a national candidate. Conservative commentators were among the first to jump ship, including *The Weekly Standard* ("Forget the Presidential Campaign. Can he still win the Senate race?"), William F. Buckley, Jr., and the neoconservative writer John Podhoretz, who tagged Allen with a new name: Felix Macacawitz.

Throughout this curious drama, which unfolded in the crucial final weeks of the campaign, Jim Webb might as well have been on vacation. "We'd be just as happy to see it all go away," Pete Brodnitz said. "We're looking forward to beating Allen on the issues, and his lack of leadership." When Webb was finally summoned back to the stage, it was not in the manner he might have wished. Inevitably, he was asked if he had ever uttered what the press, in one of its strained conventions

of delicacy, called "the 'n' word." He answered in a way that made it pretty clear that he had. "I don't think that there's anyone who grew up around the South that hasn't had the word pass through their lips at one time in their life," he told a reporter for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. That statement prompted demands for clarification, which came, in a fashion, from Webb's spokeswoman, Kristian Denny Todd. Webb didn't want to issue any blanket denial regarding the offensive word, as Allen had, she said. "Jim has not used the word directed at another person. He's never used it himself as a racial slur."

When October arrived, bringing with it the fresh scandal of the Florida congressman Mark Foley's sexual exploitation of House pages, the frenzy in Virginia finally ended, with the race still being considered a toss-up. One possible outcome is that Allen, should he hold his Senate seat, will emerge as an even stronger national candidate, having weathered scrutiny of an intensity usually reserved for Presidential nominees.

As for Jim Webb, he seemed, by the ending days of the campaign, to be something less than the Happy Warrior. He had come into the race as a Democratic iconoclast, hoping to advance the debate on Iraq while broadening the Party, but he had found himself taken captive by George Allen's controversies. He'd shown no taste for this sort of political knife fight, and one sensed that if this first campaign also proved to be his last he would survive the disappointment.

On the other hand, he has made some new friends. As an underdog challenger, running against an incumbent with deep pockets, Webb would inevitably have to come to terms with the Democratic Party's two biggest stars. In late summer, he met privately with Hillary Clinton. "I went into the meeting not really expecting that I would necessarily like her, or that she would like me," he recalled. "But I've got to tell you, I was impressed." Last week, on the day George Allen brought President Bush to Virginia, James Webb and Bill Clinton held a fund-raiser of their own. When the two men met with reporters, Clinton said, "I'm encouraged for my country that we're here together," and he thanked his fellow-Democrat for the "sheer audacity" of his decision to make the race. ♦

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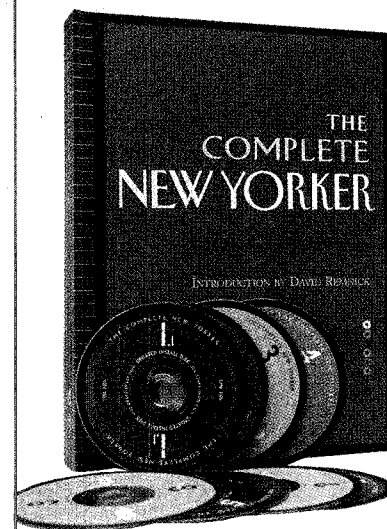
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MY FIRST DAY IN HELL

BY JACK HANDEY

My first day in Hell is drawing to a close. They don't really have a sunset here, but the fires seem to dim a bit, and the screaming gets more subdued. Most of the demons are asleep now, their pointy tails curled up around them. They look so innocent, it's hard to believe that just a few hours ago they were raping and torturing us.

The day started off at a party at the Chelsea Hotel, where some friends were daring me to do something. The next thing I knew, I was in Hell. At first, it seemed like a dream, but then I remembered that five-Martini dreams are usually a lot worse.

There's a kind of customs station when you arrive here, where a skeleton in a black robe checks a big book to make sure your name's there. And as he slowly scans the pages with his bony finger you can't help thinking, Why does a skeleton need a robe? Especially since it's so hot. That's the first thing you notice about Hell, how hot it is. I know it's a cliché, but it's true. Fortunately, it's a steamy, sulfury kind of hot. Like a spa or something.

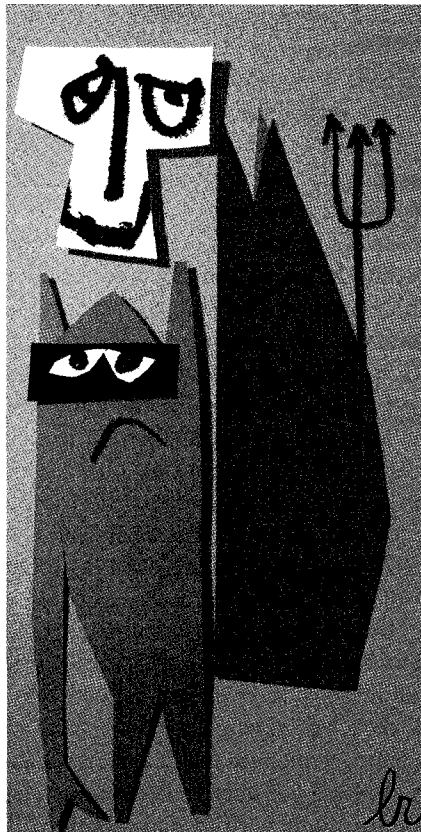
You might think that people in Hell are all nude. But that's a myth. You wear what you were last wearing on earth. For instance, I am dressed like the German U-boat captain in the movie "Das Boot," because that's what I wore to the party. It's an easy costume, because all you really need is the hat. The bad part is, people are always asking you who you are, even in Hell. Come on! "Das Boot"!

The food here turns out to be surprisingly good. The trouble is, just about all of it is poisoned. So a few minutes after you finish eating you're doubled over in agony. The weird thing is, as soon as you recover you're ready to dig in all over again.

Despite the tasty food and warm weather, there's a dark side to Hell. For one thing, it's totally disorganized. That anything gets done down here is a miracle. You'll be herded along in one big

line, then it'll separate into three lines, then the lines will all come back together again! For no apparent reason! It's crazy. You try to ask a demon a question, but he just looks at you. I don't mean to sound prejudiced, but you wonder if they even speak English.

To relieve the boredom, you can throw rocks at other people in line. They



just think it was a demon. But I discovered the hard way that the demons don't like it when they're beating someone and you join in.

It's odd, but Hell can be a lonely place, even with so many people around. They all seem caught up in their own little worlds, running to and fro, wailing and tearing at their hair. You try to make conversation, but you can tell they're not listening.

A malaise set in within a couple hours

of my arriving. I thought getting a job might help. It turns out I have a lot of relatives in Hell, and, using connections, I became the assistant to a demon who pulls people's teeth out. It wasn't actually a job, more of an internship. But I was eager. And at first it was kind of interesting. After a while, though, you start asking yourself: Is this what I came to Hell for, to hand different kinds of pliers to a demon? I started wondering if I should even have come to Hell at all. Maybe I should have lived my life differently, and gone to Heaven instead.

I decided I had to get away—the endless lines, the senseless whipping, the forced sing-alongs. You get tired of trying to explain that you've already been branded, or that something that big won't fit in your ear, even with a hammer. I wandered off. I needed some *me* time. I came to a cave and went inside. Maybe I would find a place to meditate, or some gold nuggets.

That's when it happened, one of those moments which could only happen in Hell. I saw Satan. Some people have been in Hell for hundreds of years and have never seen Satan, but there he was: he was shorter than I thought he'd be, but he looked pretty good. He was standing on a big rock with his reading glasses on. I think he was practicing a speech. "Hey, Satan," I yelled out, "how's it going?" I was immediately set upon by demons. I can't begin to describe the tortures they inflicted on me, because apparently they are trade secrets. Suffice it to say that, even as you endure all the pain, you find yourself thinking, Wow, how did they think of *that*?

My stitches are a little itchy, but at least the demons sewed most of my parts back on. More important, my faith in Hell as an exciting place where anything can happen has been restored.

I had better get some rest. They say the bees will be out soon and that it's hard to sleep with the constant stinging. I lost my internship, but I was told I can reapply in a hundred years. Meanwhile, I've been assigned to a construction crew. Tomorrow we're supposed to build a huge monolith, then take picks and shovels and tear it down, then beat each other to death. It sounds pointless to me, but what do I know. I'm new here. ♦

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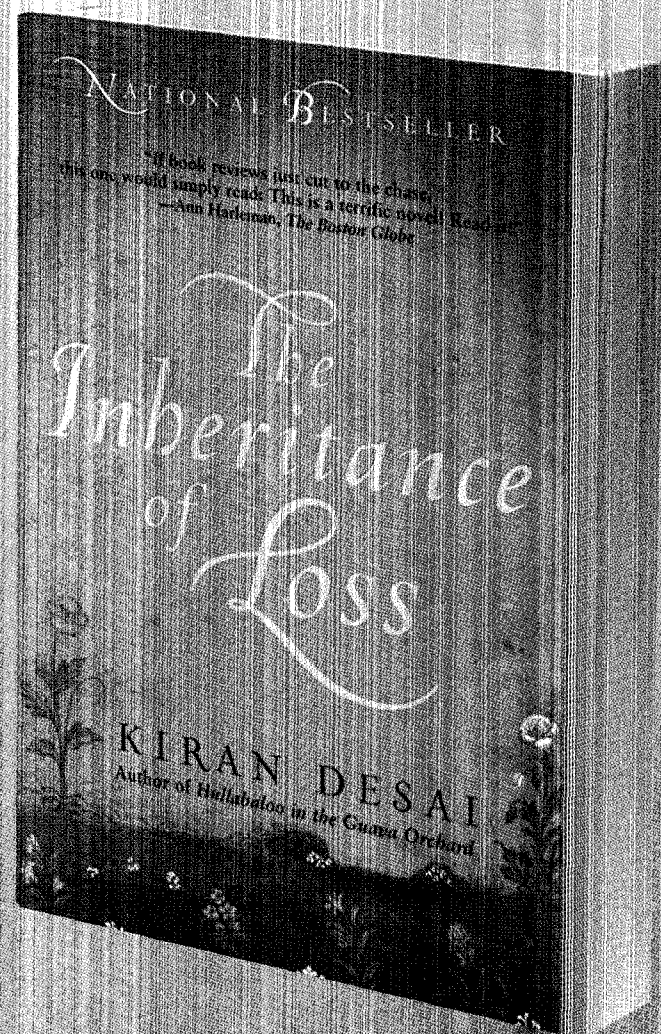
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PERSONAL HISTORY

SNOOK

Finding the perfect fish.

BY IAN FRAZIER

When I was in high school in Hudson, Ohio, I had a neighbor named Pete Snook. The Snooks lived one street over from us, and our back yards met on a tangent, in a brushy, unlandscaped area of the kind you don't see much today. I made a path through it in the mornings walking to Pete's house so he could drive me to school. He drove a Volkswagen that had no trash on the floor and never broke down. I believe it was his own. Pete was a serious, straightforward, imperturbable guy with a wiry figure and short dark hair and dark eyes. He acted older than the rest of us, like a grownup consigned for a certain number of years to the body of a teen-ager. He was a grade ahead of me, and, aside from the trips to and from school, we didn't hang out together, but I admired his style.

One morning we got to school and were standing near our lockers by a hallway intersection in the main building during the bustle of kids coming and going before class. A younger kid stopped and ragged Pete. The kid was a wise-acre, funny and smart with a big mouth, though not a bad guy. As he was running on, he made a remark about a girl in town. Pete said something back to him, and the kid followed up his first remark with another. All at once, Pete turned and took the kid by the lapels—ours was a boys' school, we had to wear jackets and ties—and lifted him with a quick thrust of his forearms against the wall. With an expression of intense seriousness, he told the kid never to say anything like that again. I remember the poor kid's mouth open so wide he had several double chins, and the wideness of his eyes. He said he was just joking, sorry, don't get carried away—what a person in that situation usually says. Snook then set him back on the floor, and we went on with our day.

The incident passed by in a second and had no consequences that I know of.

I never heard it referred to afterward. But it has stayed with me, I'm not sure why. For a blink, I glimpsed through an everyday surface to the machinery working inside. Also, I would have given a lot to be able to make such a move. At sixteen and seventeen, I wanted desperately to be tough. I used to practice my toughness in front of a mirror: "I'm gonna hit you so hard it'll put your entire family in the hospital!" Even given the latitude of fantasy, the effect was laughable. I could not figure out how Snook had pulled it off. Now I think the secret was, first, that he had right on his side, and, second, that his purpose was as much instructional as it was threatening: cheesy comments, especially about girls, have an unpredictable aspect that can call down a thunderbolt. Mostly what I'm remembering, I guess, was a moment of real and instant justice, a rarity in the world.

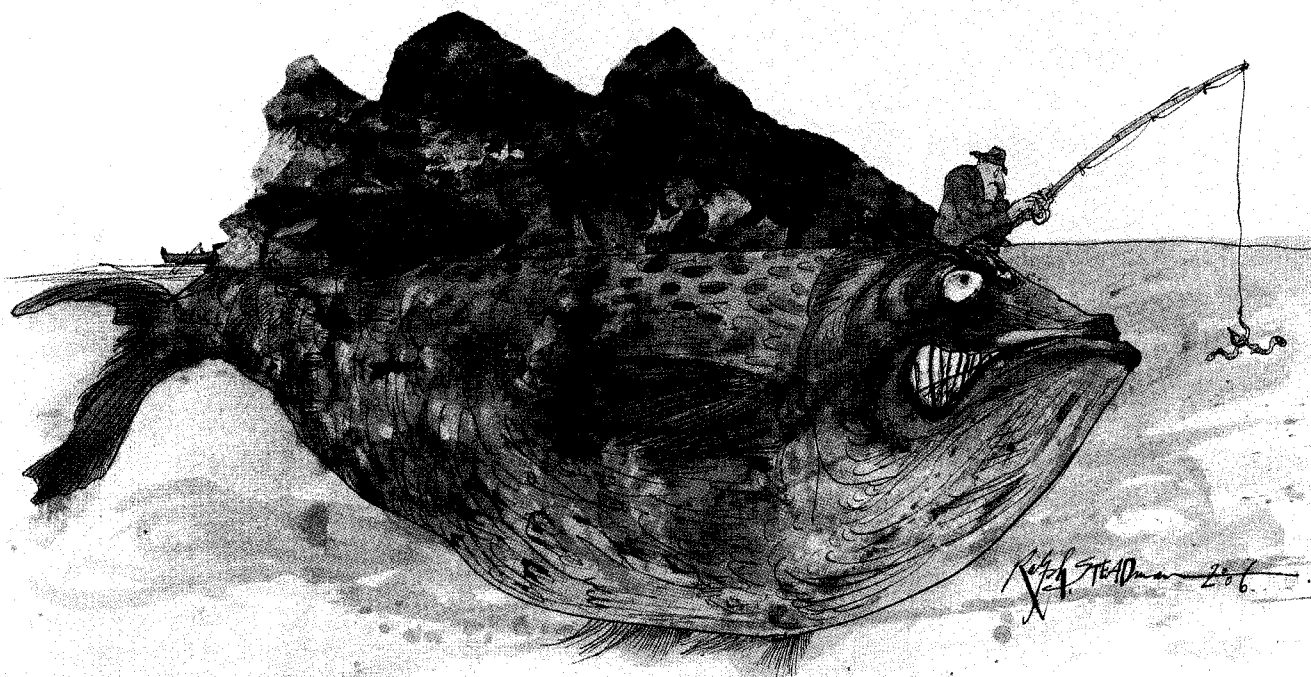
I think I also admired Snook simply for his name. My grandmother lived in Florida, and when I visited her I fished, dreamily and unskillfully, and, among the many kinds of fish I never caught but wanted to, number one was the snook. I read about snook in sporting magazines, saw them mounted on the walls of tackle shops and restaurants, and thought they were cool. The snook is an elegantly constructed fish. It's narrow, but not too—not snaky like a pike or a barracuda—nor does it grow to be chunky like its distant relative the bass. The snook's shape is close to the platonic ideal for a fish, in my opinion. The slight concavity of its upper jaw gives it a racy, rakish profile. A narrow, ruler-straight line the color of tattoo ink runs along its side, which is an understated silvery-white. The snook does not have the pointy teeth that make similar predatory fish look forbidding and comical, the implication being that it hunts so well it doesn't need them.

Snook live in tropical and near-tropical places. They're an oceanic fish, but

they also like brackish water inland—coastal rivers and mangrove swamps subject to big fluctuations of tide. A snook finds a good place in a dark pool beneath some mangrove roots and waits, and when prey comes within range he strikes swiftly and with authority. He moves seaward, occupying new ambushes, as the tide recedes.

seas Highway, headed eventually for New York City. (I have written about this trip before, but not this part.) On one of the middle Keys, I got a ride from a young guy from Kentucky with a bushy beard and dark-rimmed glasses. The Kentuckian said he had come down to the Keys to take a look at a sailboat he wanted to buy. He said that if I didn't

They led to a turnoff from U.S. Highway 1 onto a white marl road that went among encroaching mangroves and ended at a neat little development by a canal. Each pastel-colored one-story house sat back among palmettos and poinciana trees, and next to each house was a slip big enough for a good-sized boat. We found the house, got out, and walked down to the



Fishing, of course, is faith. You have to focus on each cast as if it were the very one that is going to produce the fish of your dreams.

For years I never got a good look at a snook in the flesh, or in the fish. At a New Year's Eve party in Key West, I recall people drinking on a pier, dock lights overhead, baitfish gathering underneath in the light, and suddenly a big fish scything through the bait, strewing them around in splashes as they tried to escape. We looked over the edge and watched. Someone said it was a snook. I was still deciding whether to run to my grandmother's and get my fishing rod when the predator vanished and the commotion died down. Another time, I was on a bottom-fishing boat when the mate yelled for everybody to come to the bow and cast to a school of snook chasing mullet. Again, in half a minute they were gone.

But if you love fish, and keep watching for them, every so often fate grants you a vision. One spring, I hitchhiked north from Key West along the Over-

mind riding around with him while he searched for the sailboat, and didn't mind waiting while he examined it and talked to the owner, he would then give me a ride some hundreds of miles north to the Florida town where he lived. I said O.K.

This Kentuckian was a troubled soul. He had quit the Kentucky National Guard because he had been upset by the shootings of students at Kent State University by the Ohio National Guard a few years before. The Kentuckian had friends in the Ohio National Guard, and could not understand how any guardsmen could have acted as the ones at Kent State did. He thought perhaps they had been framed, or hadn't known their ammo was live, or something. He kept turning this painful puzzle over in his mind. Now he had decided he wanted to live on a sailboat for a while. As he talked, he followed some handwritten directions he had.

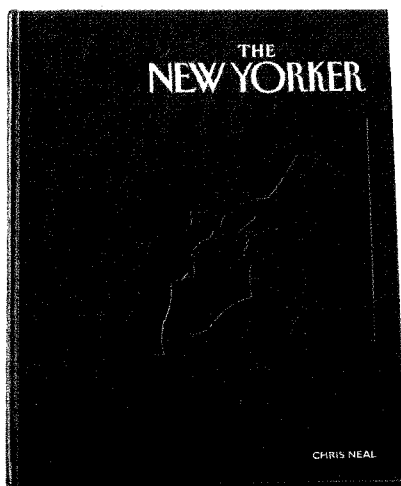
single-masted sailboat tied up alongside.

A bright sun shone from almost straight overhead. The sailboat floated in the clear water; extending below it to the sandy bottom was its precise, hull-shaped shadow. I looked more closely. In the middle of the shadow, between the boat and the bottom, finning almost imperceptibly, was a snook. My idling, time-killing mood stopped as if I'd just tromped on the brakes. A snook! Twenty-five feet away! With a snookish sense of aesthetics, the fish made a symmetrical third among the images of sailboat and shadow. He had even positioned himself facing the same direction as the boat's bow. The way he was holding there, you could have easily missed him, so boldly did he mimic boat and shadow, hiding motionless in plain sight.

In the other shadows—of the pilings, of the dock—baitfish flickered.

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Soon one would forget the snook was there and wander into the boat's inviting shade, and—*pow!* I could have watched all day. But the word had just got out, apparently. In a minute along the dock came a skinny, darkly tanned man with kinky blond hair. In one hand he carried a plastic bucket of water with half a dozen live shrimp, in the other a spinning rod. He plucked a highly unwilling shrimp from the bucket, hooked it just once through the shell behind the head, gauged the distance, and flipped the shrimp under the boat. The shrimp, knowing what he was in for, shot backward and downward for the sand at maximum speed. The snook hit him before he'd gone two feet.

With a jerk the hook was set, and there followed the wildest close-quarters angling battle I'd ever seen. The snook dove this way and that around the boat's keel, veered for the pilings, jumped, thwapped his tail against the boat, splashed, cartwheeled, all as if right before us in a bathtub. The angler had foreseen the street fight. His line was extra-stout, his hook strong. Soon he had the fish up on the dock and was pushing a stringer through his gills. Before he carted him off for supper, he let me marvel at the trophy lying there gasping on the planking. The older guy

I am now wishes the snook had been left alone in his ingenious lie. But the young guy I was then had really wanted to see what would happen, and stare close up, and touch the wonder with his hand.

As the Kentuckian and I drove off, I kept talking about the snook. I said that I loved fish and fishing, and I also mentioned that I had always wanted an aquarium but had never taken the trouble to provide myself with one. At this, the Kentuckian looked at me sternly through his glasses' dark rims. "You've always wanted an aquarium? And yet you never went out and bought yourself one?" He paused to let the weight of my negligence sink in. "You should be horsewhipped!" he pronounced.

I did go to New York City on that trip. There I got a job, found an apartment, and for a while didn't travel to much of anywhere. In the city, I missed the rest of the country, especially the Midwest; I wanted to go fishing again in unfabulous places far from anybody. My friend Don was working in Chicago and also eager to escape. He told me he had heard about a northern-Michigan river called the Pigeon that was supposed to have good fly-fishing for brown trout. Late one May, I flew out to Chi-



cago and met him, and we drove seven hours north to give the Pigeon a try.

Midwestern trout streams tend to get less press than the freestone rivers of the East and the Rockies. Midwestern rivers are slower, swampier, muddier, grassier; they often have tunnel-effect overhanging trees and fewer opportunities for long, photogenic back casts. The riverbeds are more likely to be clay or sand, ideal for burrowing mayfly nymphs that hatch into big winged insects like the brown drake or the *Hexagenia limbata*, perfect food for big trout. There's a humming, humid lushness to nighttime trout fishing in the Midwest (the big insects often stay on the water until late at night) that fills the senses and staggers you back on your heels.

Don and I knew nothing about the Pigeon. When to fish it, with what kind of flies, imitating what kind of bugs—those key details remained a mystery. We pitched Don's tent at a state-forest campsite on the riverbank, and immediately action started popping everywhere. The big mayflies were hatching, the trout were jumping and feeding and stuffing themselves, so that it made even us hungry. We tried every fly in our tackle boxes. We changed leader size, found different stretches of river to fish, cast endlessly, endlessly. Not one fish, not one strike. This happened day after day while our bafflement assumed gigantic proportions.

About two miles from camp, the river curved against a clay cliff maybe twenty feet high. Just downstream from it, the current ran close to the bank in a deep and slow stretch lined by tag-alder bushes. Fish took up feeding positions here one beside the next, so that a cast to the first fish would also float the fly over four or five more after him. One evening, I was fishing this stream while Don, upstream, cast to the opposite bank. I kept dropping the fly right in the middle of the bull's-eye left by the lead fish's rise form. Not only didn't he strike; he nimbly picked real insects from the surface an inch or two to the right or left of my artificial, and then his companions downstream did the same. I began to cast frantically in the craven hope that I might snag one of the fish by accident. In mid-cast I looked up and saw a man watching from atop the cliff.

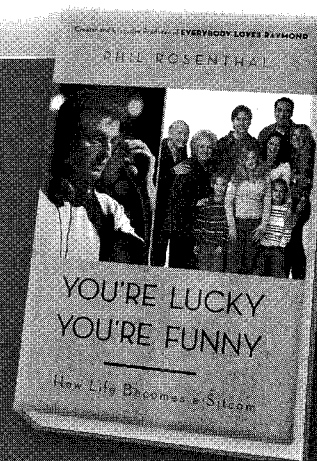
In certain moods, I hate running into other anglers on the stream, so I quickly looked away, following with fake concentration the progress of my despised fly. Had I examined the man more closely, I would have seen a master fly fisherman, in scuffed waders and flop hat, smoking a stubby cigar to discourage mosquitoes. He asked how I was doing, and I said something surly, not looking up. He stood a bit longer, then wished us a cheerful goodbye and good luck, and disappeared.

We returned to camp in the dark—wet, fishless, and bummed. The next morning, we decided that we had to find a tackle shop at all costs and ask somebody, anybody, what was going on. Fly-fishing had not become so popular then. In the hardware stores and sporting-goods stores we searched out in little towns, nobody knew about trout flies. Finally, at a phone booth in Vanderbilt, Michigan, we found a Yellow Pages that showed a more promising tackle store in Gaylord, nine miles away. We drove over, parked in front, went in. Standing behind the counter was the man I'd seen on the cliff the night before. "You should've been using an Adams, size 12," he said, even before "Hello." "I had some I could've given you. After I saw you I caught a couple twenty-two-inch browns, and a brookie seventeen inches long."

The reason I mention this man is that his name was (and is) Fred Snook. In later years, Don and I fished with him, met his wife and kids, had dinner at his house. With Fred, the affinity between last name and fish had become explicit: Fred owned the Alphorn Shop, a sporting-goods store stocked with all kinds of fishing equipment, especially fly-fishing gear and highly effective local trout flies tied by Fred. (As you go through life, by the way, you will find surprisingly often that people take up professions suggested by their last names. When I began to write that sentence, I thought many examples would come to mind, but now the only one I can think of is my former optician in New York City, Dr. Morton Blinder.)

Fred Snook was the first truly gifted angler I ever fished with. He took us out on local waters—the Sturgeon River, as well as the Pigeon—and showed us how

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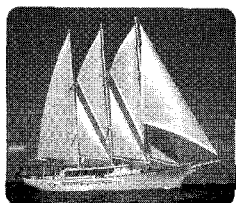
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he fished in heavy brush. Fred could put a dry fly in a saucer-size hole among a confusion of branches and twigs where even visualizing the cast seemed to call for trigonometry and string theory. When the only open airspace around him was directly overhead, Fred could make his back cast go straight up. You wondered how Fred himself ventured through some of the places he fished, like you wonder when a buck with big antlers comes out of a dense thicket. He had an otherworldly facility for not getting person or gear tangled, and he always found a quick out when, rarely, he did.

From Fred I learned that if your fly snags on something, underwater or above, you mustn't bow the rod and yank and cuss, but (if possible) pull the line through the line guides and reach the rod tip to the fly until it's right on it. Some jigging around then often pops the hook free. Once when we'd been fishing the Sturgeon and Fred was almost late to attend one of his kids' school plays, he humped double time through swamp brush and pine trees as thick as dog hair while Don and I, twenty years younger than he, straggled far behind. I absorbed a lesson there, too—about always fishing to the limit, but not making your family mad.

Fishing, of course, is faith. You have to focus on each cast as if it were the very one that is going to produce the fish of your dreams. In fact, on almost every cast nothing happens. Maintaining faith through blankness repeated hundreds of times is the sport's essential discipline. In my case, I tried to put the fly in the exact spot I thought a fish would be and, when I received the usual nothing in return, often I lost interest and sulked. "You gave up on it! Stay with it!" Fred said whenever he saw me do that. He always fished out each cast and gave each little piece of water his hopeful attention. I saw him get huge strikes when his fly was on slack current a few feet from the tip of his fly rod. Because he often hooked fish close in, where the shock was heavy and sudden, he checked the end of his leader after every few casts to make sure nothing had frayed it. Meticulous care was his liturgy. He waded dextrously, watched an expanse of good water for a few minutes before he fished it, stayed calm when he saw a big fish.

One of the sharpest underwater vistas I recall is of Fred's weighted pink-salmon-egg fly—a pattern called the Thor—about three feet below the surface of the pewter-tinted, perfectly clear Sturgeon, skirting shaggy tree roots and the tangled branches of drowned logs on a controlled path as neat as if cut with an Ex-acto knife.

But this is a story about snook as well as Snook, so it now returns, circuitously, to Florida.

Years later, I was married and living in Brooklyn with my wife and our two young children. She was planning our spring vacation. For sentimental reasons involving the city of Sarasota and a pay telephone (in earlier times she and I had split up; I had moved from New York to Montana, she had gone to Florida; her apartment in Sarasota had no phone; one day out of the blue she called me from a pay phone on the street; I was sitting in my cabin in the woods forty miles from Kalispell; we talked; when her coins ran out I wrote the pay phone's number on the wall and called her back; before hanging up we agreed in principle to get back together; the next evening I was feeling happy about that and wanted to give her a call; the only number I had was of the pay phone; as it happened, she and her sister at that moment were walking back to the apartment from a bar; their route happened to go by the pay phone; as they passed they heard it ringing; when she picked up on the fourth ring, I was not particularly surprised; and so on), we chose Florida for our first long vacation with the children.

We flew to Orlando, spent a few days at Disney World, and then went to Sarasota, where we showed the children the pay phone. They were perhaps more impressed with it than they let on, or not. From there we drove down the Gulf Coast to the small town of Everglades City. My wife had included it for my benefit because a guidebook said that it had good fishing. Not since I was a kid had I seen anyplace in Florida I liked so much. The town reminded me of the pre-modern, unfancy Florida I used to visit with my grandmother. As soon as we arrived, I set about to hire a fishing guide and catch some snook.

Later, it turned out that the guide

I'd found was a semi-famous tarpon angler. He assured me he could put me onto lots of snook, but somehow every place we went, every time we turned around, we met another pod of tarpon. I ended up catching two tarpon, including one of about five feet, the biggest fish I'd ever caught of any kind. Tarpon have big scales and a lower jaw that's overshot, like a bulldog's. In that flat coastal landscape—tidal river, mangrove islands, horizon—the giant I hooked was a sudden stroke of verticality, leaping and splashing and spinning like a waterspout touched down. Tarpon are noble and bilingual fish that make long migratory journeys between the American coast and Mexico and back again. I liked watching them cruise by two or three abreast in the shallow bays and then continue into the far distance, the long front spines of their dorsal fins tracking above the surface like whip antennas. After such a successful day, to mention that I'd really been hoping for a snook would have seemed small.

Then, last spring, I got another chance to go to Everglades City. I was writing a short article for *Architectural Digest* about the Rod & Gun Club, a venerable motel where we'd stayed. This time when seeking a guide, I asked around for one with credentials for snook (which people there pronounce to rhyme with "fluke"). The name several people gave me was Don McKinney. At seven on a Saturday morning, I was driving down gravel roads in the neighboring town of Chokoloskee looking for the place where I was supposed to meet him. A guy came riding by on a wide-tire bicycle holding an unwieldy bouquet of fishing rods in one hand. Barely glancing over, he guessed who I was and waved with the rods for me to follow him.

This boat ain't as fancy as some," Don McKinney said as we climbed down into it from the dock where he keeps it, behind a friend's trailer home. Indeed, the craft suggested a piece of fibreglass stamped into boat shape from a blank with a single blow. A Pollock-ish decorating scheme of random paint splatters had worn off all its surfaces but the vertical ones. Don McKinney stowed the gear and then unfastened a long fibreglass

pole from the gunwale and began to pole us out of the canal, grounding now and then in muck because of the low tide. On the bank, a neighbor stood and jawed with him awhile as we inched around embedded hurricane debris. "I caught a twelve-pound jewfish right under that piece of roof last week," he told the neighbor, pointing to a rusted rectangle of corrugated metal we had just passed. The neighbor asked if he had kept the jewfish, and Don McKinney said, "No-o-o-o I did not. I don't know who this guy sitting here might be" (pointing at me).

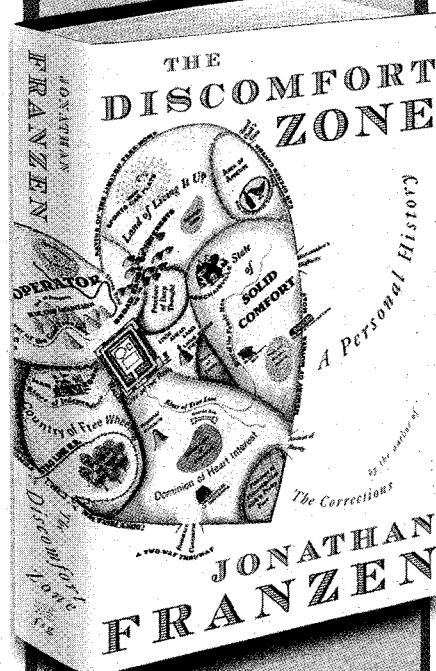
"You ain't allowed to keep jewfish anymore, anywhere in the state of Florida," he explained once we'd left the neighbor behind. "They're an endangered fish, so you gotta let 'em go, big and little. You're not supposed to call 'em jewfish no more, neither. Their new name is the Goliath grouper. I don't want to offend nobody, so I try to remember. But I'm sixty years old and I been callin' 'em jewfish all my life, and I imagine I'll continue to."

Poling steadily, Don McKinney took us past the waterfront of Chokoloskee. The whole place still seemed to be wincing from the last hurricane. The sky-high Washington palms leaned away from the water as if the huge fist out there were still raised. At their frazzled tops, a few thin fronds dangled. Many houses in Chokoloskee had bright-blue tarpaulins on all or part of their roofs where the shingles had blown off. A houseboat sat awkwardly on the shore, tilted sideways on its port pontoon. Most of the dock pilings towered thirty feet or more in the air, mud marks up three-quarters of their length; the hurricane waves had hammered on the dock boards from below, driving the pilings up out of the mud and eventually knocking most of the boards away. Now the pilings were of a height from which you could step onto a mid-sized naval vessel. Don McKinney said that insurance won't pay for fixing docks, so people aren't sure what they'll do.

Once we had enough draft, he let down the engine and we roared across one reach and then another, heading inland, until we turned into the mouth of a tidal river and swooped up it like "Apocalypse Now." As the river narrowed we slowed, the boat rocking on its own wake, and then coasted into a quiet

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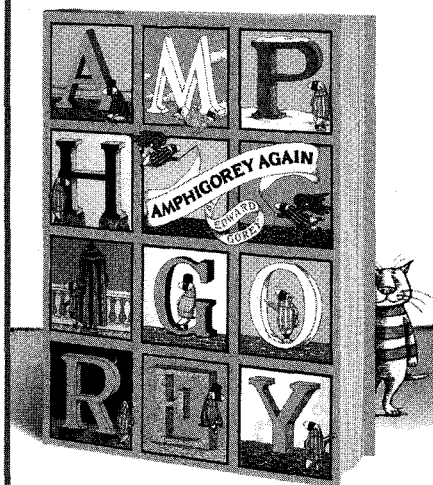
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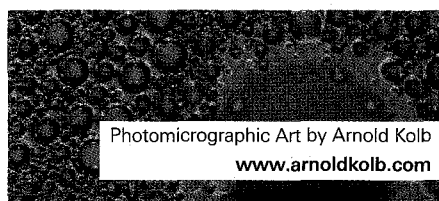
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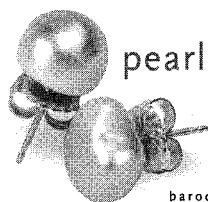


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intersection where this river met a smaller one. We eased next to the mangroves on our left, and Don McKinney shoved the pole among them into the muck and tied us to it. Mangroves enclosed us, their thicket of flying-buttress roots chuckling softly in the falling tide. He took out a cigar and lit it using a Zippo lighter emblazoned with a leaping fish in gold—a present from a high-ranking executive at Zippo for whom he sometimes guides. With that he seemed to complete himself, finally. Don McKinney has pale-blue eyes and a long, shrewd face that a cigar seamlessly becomes part of.

He began telling me just where in this particular intersection a snook might lie. Beneath that crotch of old tree trunk, veined like bridge cable; next to that stump; or right over there, against that far bank, where the water looks deep and dark and likely. When the perturbation of our arrival quieted down, the surface became glass-still again. The spot he indicated, pointing to it now with the tip of his bait-casting rod, reflected the mangroves above it, their shiny green oval leaves with here and there a yellow one, and a few white, dead branches corkscrewing out, and on the branches several air plants, a lovely parasite that grows on dead wood and resembles the top of a pineapple. Don McKinney cast his top-water plug into the heart of the likely spot, inches from the bank. He let the plug sit a moment, then gave it a twitch. At that, a snook struck with a violent swirl that twisted the surface reflection around itself like a bedsheet.

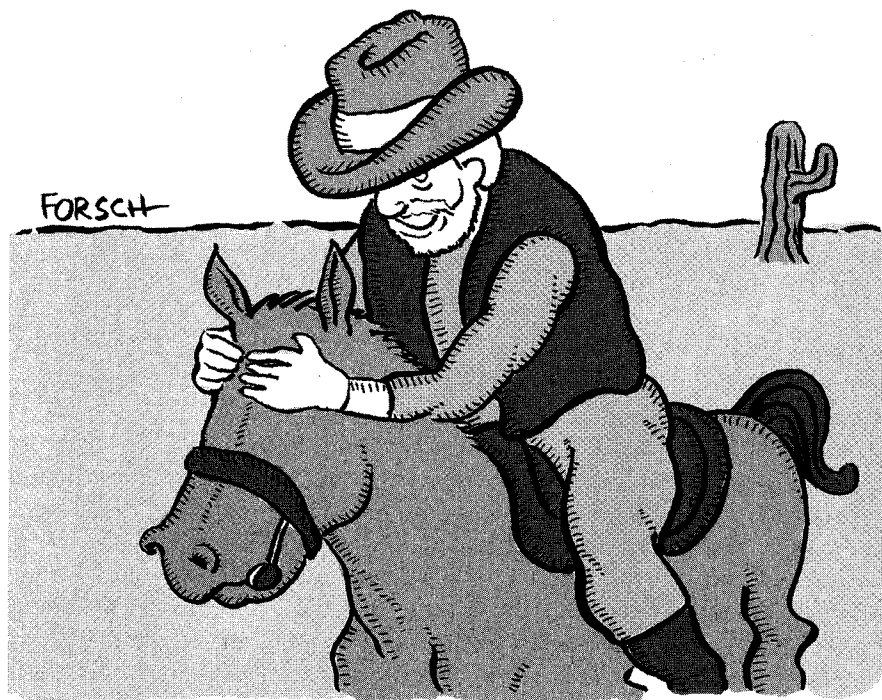
The sight caused me to become overwrought, shouting quietly and fumbling with my spinning rod. I was exaggerating my reaction, but only a little; earlier, I had heard Don McKinney say to his neighbor by the canal that he hated guiding highly experienced fishermen who make a point of how hard to impress they are. I wanted to demonstrate that I was more the overly excitable sort, as well as serious about catching a snook. After I calmed down and got a grip, I laid about three hundred casts in that intersection, back in all the mangrove-root culs-de-sac I could reach—but no go. Looking up the river, I saw a strange surface bulge coming at us. As it came even and passed, I saw below it three immense manatees. They swam by in a second about two feet down, as grace-

ful as fat people who can really dance.

After that first excitement we fished for hour upon hour without another strike from a snook. Don McKinney said the first one hadn't been too interested, either, or he would have taken the lure. Sometimes the rivers we went up became tunnels in whose ceilings the mangrove branches met, and we snapped through cross-river spiderwebs in the gloom. The heat came down and sat on us and on everything like a slab of sheet iron. Still no strikes. Nothing was going on at all. Extreme boringness in fishing has its fun side sometimes. Don McKinney sat in the boat and ate generic fig newtons and told me how much cheaper they were at K mart than at the A. & P. Then we talked about the horrible cost of health care, and the immigration problem, and how lousy country music is today.

I kept casting with a pleasant sense of pointlessness. Don McKinney changed our venue every once in a while, and smoked cigars. He buys them through the mail from a company called Thompson, in Tampa. They send the cigars and an invoice, and he mails them a check—they're a trusting company, in other words, and their cigars are No. 1. The only irritant in the day, kind of welcome in its variety, arose whenever the lure I was casting became stuck in the mangroves. I had thought that Fred Snook was the best I ever saw at getting stuck lures out, but Don McKinney can claim even higher levels of skill. When my own pulling and wiggling of the line and myself did not avail, I handed the rod to Don McKinney. His first address to the problem involved a no-hands repositioning of his cigar, shifting it by lip motion from one side of his mouth to the other and re-clenching hard with his teeth. Then, after he did some jerking, flipping, wand-waving, and a bit of pizzicato plucking on the line, the lure usually dropped free.

In my experience, fishing guides who've had no luck all day are usually ready to quit by midafternoon. They know a bad day when they see one, and at about two o'clock they write it off and move onto the next in their minds. Thinking Don McKinney might be of this stamp, at two-thirty I told him I was ready to accept reality here and give up. From under the long bill of his light-blue fishing cap he looked back



"Guess who."

at me with such reproach and disappointment that I quickly added, "But of course I'm up for more if you are." He started the engine, and we sidled through more mangrove passageways and then into a broad river, the Lopez River. We ran down that for five or six miles to where it widened into a bay, just before the Gulf. Tall trees on one side of the bay partly enclosed a cove. Because they blocked the wind, the yellow-green, slightly murky water in the cove lay flat calm. We came within casting distance of the shore, and Don McKinney pushed his pole into the bottom and tied us to it.

Like Fred Snook, I scoped out the water before I cast. In the middle of the cove, motionless after our wake died down, was a floating door. We had seen hurricane debris off and on all day, but no other doors. In fact, I couldn't recall in all my previous years of fishing ever encountering a floating door. In this bay no other object besides us floated anywhere nearby. Somehow I enjoyed seeing a door there, framed by the calm surface of the cove. Don McKinney said he thought it was a door from a shed, but certain design touches—the recessed panels in the top, middle, and bottom—made me think it might be an interior door from a house,

perhaps a bedroom door. The late-afternoon sun hit the cove at an angle and caused the prism of the door's shadow to descend into the water on a slant.

Of course I remembered the snook in the shadow of the sailboat thirty-odd years before. I cast my lure to the door three times, five times, twelve times. I put it just shy of the door, near the top, near the bottom, and beyond the door. I landed the plug with a rap right on the door itself, and then, carefully so as not to get hooked, pulled the plug off and swam it away. I really peppered that door. Nothing doing . . . Oh, well.

I made a less careful cast past the door and to the left of it. I turned to say something to Don McKinney. Maybe pausing for that extra moment or two I let the plug sink longer than I'd been doing before. Still looking at him, I began to retrieve, and felt a jolt. He was looking at my plug. On his face I saw the joyful ignition of angling triumph. I turned back. A large and handsome snook with my plug in its mouth leaped head over tail in the air. ♦

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MILLIONS FOR MILLIONS

This year's Nobel Peace Prize winner and some high-tech entrepreneurs are competing to provide credit to the world's poor.

BY CONNIE BRUCK

Over the Labor Day weekend of 1995, a ponytailed, bearded young software engineer named Pierre Omidyar wrote a code that enabled people to buy and sell items on the Internet. In the first few weeks after the program was introduced, items ranging from a Maxx comic book to a 1952 Rolls-Royce Silver Dawn changed hands. That program eventually became eBay. Not long after the company went public, in 1998, Omidyar's share of the stock offering was roughly ten billion dollars, and he became the richest thirty-two-year-old in the world. He found the experience slightly unsettling—he told friends that he had never planned to get rich—and he continued driving his Volkswagen Golf. With his wife, Pam, he started a foundation to give away large sums of money, but he was frustrated by the constraints and inefficiencies of the nonprofit world. Omidyar was searching for a way to change things on a grand scale, and, like many other highly successful young West Coast entrepreneurs, he became interested in a field called microfinance, or microcredit. In November, 2004, he and Sergey Brin and Larry Page, the co-founders of Google, and other leaders of the high-tech community gathered at the San Francisco home of the venture capitalist John Doerr for a weekend session with Muhammad Yunus, who is considered the godfather of microcredit.

Yunus, a silver-haired man of sixty-six with a round, luminous countenance, is a highly gifted interlocutor between the extremely poor in the developing world and the West, and for years he had been seen as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. (This December, he will go to Oslo to receive it.) During the famine of 1974 in Bangladesh, when the dying lined the doorsteps of the better-off in Dhaka, Yunus, an economics professor at Chittagong University, found the theories he was

teaching maddeningly irrelevant; so he went into a neighboring village and began talking to the poor. He experimented with ways of helping them—initially, he lent twenty-seven dollars to a group of forty-two villagers—and before long he became convinced that he had a remedy for their condition: providing very small individual loans to the impoverished to start activities ranging from making bamboo stools to buying a dairy cow. In 1976, after local banks refused his entreaties to make the loans, he resolved to do it himself, and he founded the Grameen Bank.

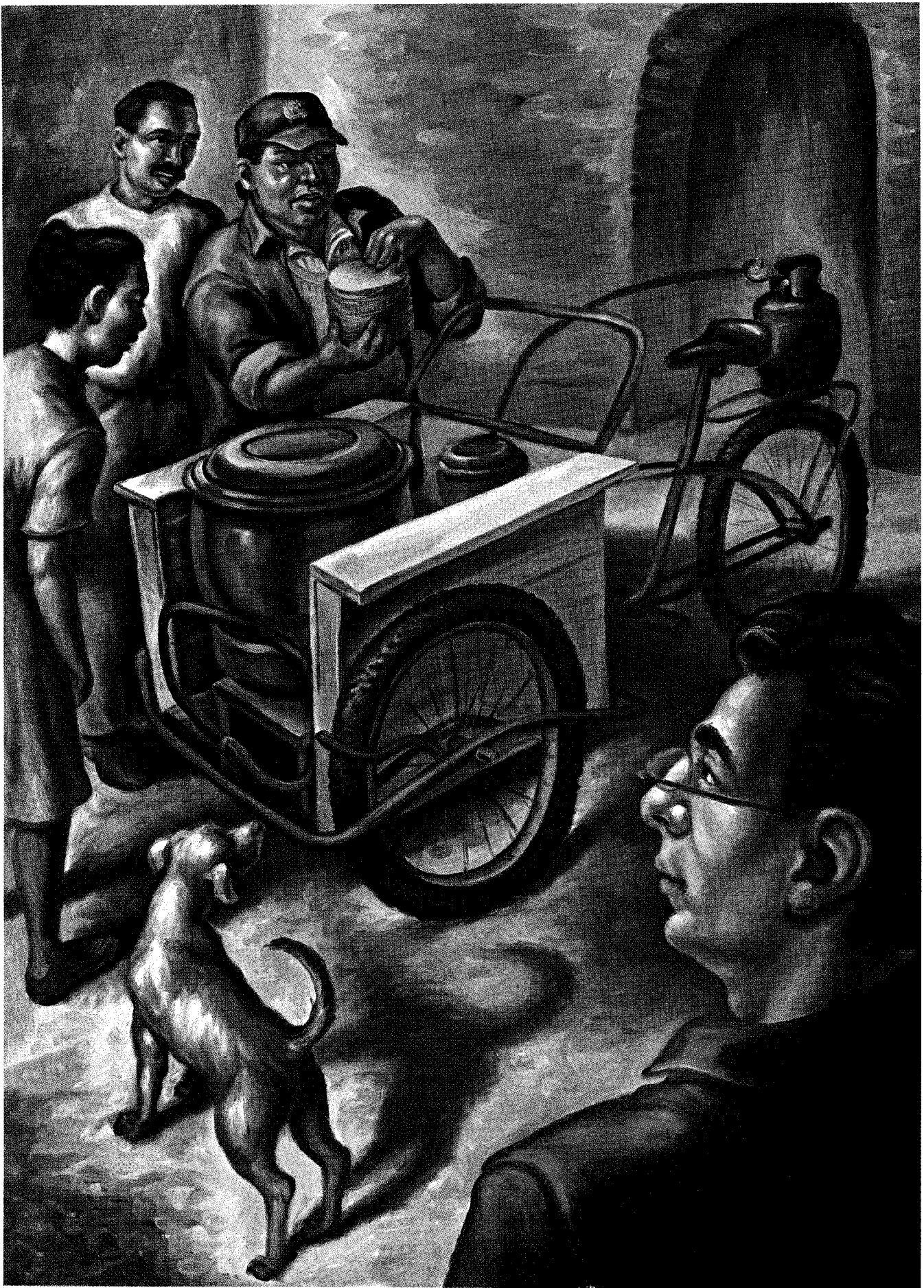
Yunus is a mesmerizing salesman. In the eighties and early nineties, the Grameen Bank received close to a hundred and fifty million dollars in soft loans and grants; today, funded by savings deposits from borrowers and others, it essentially supports itself. It has disbursed more than \$5.3 billion to nearly seven million borrowers who have no collateral; ninety-six per cent of them are groups of women, who meet once a week and, through incentives, help to insure their individual loan repayments. (Traditionally, Third World banks lend only to men. Yunus says that he developed the policy of lending mainly to women not only because they were more responsible about repaying the loans but because families benefitted more when the women controlled the money.) To cover the high cost of servicing these small loans, borrowers pay interest rates of up to twenty per cent, and Grameen claims that it recovers ninety-eight per cent of the loans. Some of Grameen's numbers have been challenged, but no one disputes Yunus's assertion that, contrary to traditional banking doctrine, the poor can be reliable borrowers, even at high rates of interest. These days, Yunus raises money for the Grameen Foundation, a global nonprofit group that supports microcredit institutions around the world. Many are related to the Gra-

meen Bank, but only loosely; Yunus believes in locally designed, run, and controlled institutions.

As microcredit has changed in the past thirty years, achieving broad recognition and even some early commercial success, Yunus has modified his methods, but he has never wavered from his goal. He insists that microcredit can lead to a world in which poverty has been extinguished and that eventually, as he puts it, there will be "poverty museums." He told his audience at Doerr's home that more than fifty per cent of the Grameen Bank's borrowers who have been in the program for more than five years have risen out of poverty, according to a simple measurement system that he himself had devised. (To have graduated from poverty, a family must have, among other things, a house with a tin roof; clean drinking water; a sanitary latrine; warm clothes for winter and mosquito netting for summer; about seventy-five dollars in a savings account; and schooling for the children.)

At lunch, Janet McKinley, a Grameen Foundation donor who used to run a major mutual fund and retired at the age of forty-nine to concentrate on microfinance, told the group that in 1995 she had visited a small program run by the Vietnam Women's Union, and saw how a loan of twenty dollars could change a woman's life. Her companion, George Miller (now her husband), gave the union a five-year grant of a million dollars, enabling it to expand from five hundred women to ten thousand, so that the more successful participants could get bigger loans and hire other women. McKinley and Miller returned each year. "There was a woman who started out with a mud hut," McKinley recalled. "When we came back, she had a three-room house with a cement floor, and the pigs were in the hut she had stayed in before." When the women first came for loans, "they sat hunched, looking down into their laps. They would take the money

OWEN SMITH



The conflict between pure do-gooders and profit-minded do-gooders defines the current debate in the microfinance world.

and fold it into a hairpin behind their ears, looking so frightened—because, they said, they were afraid they couldn't pay it back. Two or three years later, these same women were running businesses, and were often involved in politics in their village." She continued, "Does everyone succeed? No. But it is the same in the investment business. You don't want to take a lot of risk? Buy some ducks. But the more risk-taking borrowers will pool their loans and buy a baby water buffalo and rent it to men for farming. And then there are those who blow right past livestock and build a brick factory."

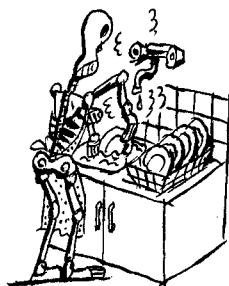
That afternoon, the participants broke into discussion groups, and were given forty-five minutes to devise a solution to end world poverty. The entrepreneurs weren't humbled by the challenge. "The inner graduate student in all these people came out," Alex Counts, the Grameen Foundation's president, said later. "They were all rushing up, taking turns at the whiteboard. And they took it so seriously!"

None, perhaps, more than Pierre Omidyar. Born in Paris to Iranian parents, Omidyar came to this country as a child in the nineteen-seventies, and viewed himself as a truly transformative capitalist. His purpose in creating the program for what became eBay was to create a perfect market, something realized only in economics textbooks, where buyers and sellers would all have equal access to information and opportunity. And microfinance, after all, was about equal access to capital.

Counts recalled that Omidyar, who is given to phrases like "Wow!" and "That's neat!," kept refining the numbers throughout the day. Omidyar was struck by Yunus's statement that the poor are natural entrepreneurs, essentially because their business activities are a matter of survival. "By giving them the tools, you unleash the entrepreneurial instinct," Omidyar told me. Janet McKinley said, "All these wealthy entrepreneurs loved it, because they say, 'This woman is an entrepreneur—just smaller scale.'"

The event at Doerr's home had been billed as a learning session, not a fundraiser, but several participants insisted that they be given a chance to contribute. Alex Counts introduced an idea that had been discussed at the Grameen Foundation for

some time: a guarantee fund. If the guests would each guarantee a certain amount of money, the combined pledged funds would constitute a letter of credit, which Grameen could present to banks in various countries to induce them to loan to local microfinance institutions—in larger amounts and at a lower rate than they otherwise would. The donors' money could continue to work in their portfolios and



would be called upon only if an institution defaulted on its loan. According to Counts, John Doerr declared that everyone should commit no less than 0.1 per cent of his net worth. "It was kind of awkward," Counts recalled, "but finally some raised their hands and said they would do it." Ul-

timately, nine people committed a total of thirty-one million dollars to the guarantee fund, which aims to reach fifty million dollars.

Omidyar, however, wasn't among them. As much as he admired Yunus's belief that anyone, provided the means, can become self-sufficient—even successful—he has a different idea about the future of microfinance. Yunus is now seen by Omidyar and many others as the archetypal founder, too wedded to his original vision. In recent years, younger and nimbler players have been taking microfinance—their preferred term—toward the idea of building a fully commercial, profit-making sector. This conflict, between pure do-gooders and profit-minded do-gooders, has come to define the current debate in the microfinance world.

During that weekend at Doerr's, Omidyar told me later, he was most impressed by the notion of "sustainability," and by the idea that microfinance could help millions of poor people. "I was asking questions—How much does it cost to reach a new borrower? How much does it cost to open a new branch?" What I was hearing back from Professor Yunus was very encouraging. So if you do the math, say it's two hundred dollars per client—and that includes initial loan capital and the cost of the loan officer and the branch. This is cocktail-napkin math, right? But multiply the two hundred dollars by the three hundred million poorest people." He estimated that three hundred million heads of household represented the world's 1.2 billion poorest

people. It would cost sixty billion dollars. "And then you're done! It's not an annual number. Once it's scaled"—that is, once it has expanded to its full potential—"it's a self-sustaining, profitable model, which opens the door to reaching large numbers of people who need to be reached by this tool of access to capital." Microfinance institutions would eventually be able to raise money in the capital markets, and no longer have to rely perpetually on donor funding. "Rather than saying it's going to cost forty-five billion dollars a year, this year, next year, and forever, you can think of it as an initial investment—but there's a cap to how much you're ever going to put in. That's the difference between microfinance and the typical sort of government aid or charity, which is an ongoing thing."

Yunus, too, believes in sustainability, and he certainly wants to reach all the world's poor, but he is convinced that the traditional goal of business—maximization of profit—is inappropriate when dealing with the poor. "I had a long debate with Pierre," Yunus told me, referring to Omidyar. "He says people should make money. I said, Let them make money—but why do you want to make money off the poor people? You make money somewhere else. Here, you come to help them. When they have enough flesh and blood in their bodies, go and suck them, no problem. But, until then, don't do that. Whatever money you are taking away, keep it with them instead, so they can come out more quickly from poverty."

The discussions at the Doerr event, Omidyar told me, led him to "a little epiphany." He and his wife are alumni of Tufts University, to which they had already made substantial contributions; but a capital campaign was starting soon, and the president of Tufts, Lawrence Bacow, "was sort of circling," Omidyar said. "I was hearing, 'You're a pretty successful alumnus—you may have to step up.' Typically, when a donor makes a gift to a university endowment, the principal goes into an investment pool, and the annual return on that capital is what the donor can direct to a specific use. 'I said, Wait a minute! Instead of making a gift to an endowment and having it go into this pool, why not use that capital to further the mission of microfinance? Kill two birds with one stone—support the alma mater

and support the mission. That's pretty neat!" Several months later, Omidyar gave a hundred million dollars to Tufts—the largest gift in its history. But he stipulated that the principal be dedicated to a fund to invest in microfinance—specifically, in investments that would promote microfinance's commercialization.

The idea of reaching billions of the poor by achieving "scale"—a word invoked ceaselessly in the microfinance community—has enticed foundations, rich individuals, even investors into channelling millions into microfinance. The \$1.2-billion Michael and Susan Dell Foundation—established by the founder of one of the world's largest computer manufacturers—has begun making grants to microfinance institutions in India, a country of 1.1 billion people, most of whom have no access to financial services. In October, 2005, Google established a philanthropic entity called Google.org, with seed money of about a billion dollars, to fight disease, global warming, and poverty; microfinance is expected to be a key component of its poverty portfolio. And last April the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced that it would devote an undisclosed amount of money to expanding financial services for the poor in developing countries. Dr. Rajiv Shah, who oversees the new Gates program, said of microfinance, "This can reach hundreds of millions of people, and do so in a way that helps them move out of poverty and that sustains over time."

In 1990, Carmen Velasco, a Bolivian psychologist, and Lynne Patterson, an American then living in Bolivia, founded an organization called Pro Mujer. It is, in many ways, a classic microcredit N.G.O., inspired by the Yunus model, and its clients are predominantly very poor women. It provides credit for income-producing activities, but, unlike a bank, it also offers its clients training in health care, family planning, child development, and self-esteem. Velasco, who still runs the organization, says, "If you give them a loan and don't see that their other needs are met, perhaps they are worse off. They have a debt to repay, but still they have no sanitation, no health care, no education." Unlike many N.G.O.s, however, Pro Mujer largely supports itself. "We don't fudge on our numbers, we have the best auditing firms, we have received awards

and high ratings for our business practices," Velasco said. "And as soon as we become more efficient we lower the interest rates our clients have to pay. If we weren't financially viable, we wouldn't have the right to argue for our way." By "our way," Velasco meant the traditional emphasis on social justice—even though, as she put it, "the fashion today is all about making it into a business."

Last spring, I accompanied some Pro Mujer officials to the rural town of Tizayuca, about a two-hour drive from Mexico City. Twenty Pro Mujer clients—all women—were sitting under the canopy of a large tree outside a simple stucco house. "Presente," one after another responded as their names were called. They were attending their weekly meeting. The women ranged in age from their twenties to their fifties; many had small children with them, who played nearby or sat solemnly on their mothers' laps. This day's session—after the women had made their payments to the treasurer—was devoted to self-esteem. The instructor, a relentlessly energetic woman, was encouraging members of the group to stand and describe how they viewed themselves. One by one, they rose, took a few steps into the center of the circle, and began to speak.

Like all Pro Mujer clients, the women had begun by forming a group and then

taking a week of training to learn about the process and develop a business plan. By the week's end, they had elected their board and chosen a name for themselves—Mujeres del Futuro. They had started by each borrowing two thousand pesos, or about two hundred dollars, in a three-month loan; then they had graduated to three thousand pesos, then four thousand, and now they were borrowing five thousand pesos, in a six-month program. They had advanced to the higher loan level after repaying the smaller loans. Weekly savings were mandatory, as were the installments on repaying the loan. Each woman was engaged in what might be called a microbusiness. Some sold quesadillas or tortillas at a market stand; others sold women's underwear, Tupperware, or blankets, mainly door to door.

The Pro Mujer officials began asking questions. What do your husbands do? Several were carpenters and construction workers. Should men join the group? That sparked a great deal of laughter and rolling of eyes. "No, but let them have a different group," a woman suggested. "They would be thinking differently. They wouldn't be on the same wavelength," another said. A young, soft-spoken woman said, "There is a little machismo here. It is a great help to go out. Some husbands don't really agree that we



"Shouldn't you rake those up first and then set them on fire?"



"Do you have a skinny pant that's a little less skinny?"

should be here. Even when there is not enough income, it is difficult for husbands to acknowledge that. So there are double challenges. We have to do everything at home so that when we are here they don't have any problems in our house." Do their husbands know about their savings? "No!" they responded at once. "If they knew we managed to save," one said, "they would give us no money for the house." Not one of them had ever had a bank account, although they were all familiar with moneylenders, who generally charge about twelve to fifteen per cent a month, and in some instances as much as fifty per cent a week.

We drove to another small town, San Francisco Zacacalco, and waited on a narrow, dusty street. After a time, a stocky figure appeared, walking beside a bicycle that had been modified into a three-wheeler. It was a portable oven: balanced over the front wheel was a bright-red propane tank, which was attached by a pipe to a large aluminum

can, carried in a makeshift cart between the two rear wheels. Its inventor and owner, Ilze Concepción Rodríguez Chávez, invited us into her workplace, a two-room concrete structure, painted blue, about eight feet high. A huge Rottweiler was on the roof, barking ferociously. "Close your eyes," Chávez said, grinning with mock dismay as we entered the small room, where cans, pots, and tamale ingredients were strewn over the counters.

A warm, self-possessed woman of fifty-four, Chávez was wearing a navy baseball cap and a blue work shirt over a pink-and-blue plaid apron. She has eight children and twenty-five grandchildren. Eight years ago, she said, she and her husband were extremely poor, and they saw no way to improve their situation. But then a friend who had become a Pro Mujer client invited her to attend a meeting. Chávez said that she was worried about the one-week training program ("I learned how to read and

write making tortillas—I don't know much"), but she decided to join.

With the help of instructors, Chávez developed a business plan. She realized that the hot-tamale vender outside a nearby school came only in the afternoons; she could be there in the mornings. She started with a four-month loan amounting to about two hundred dollars. Each week, she met with the other members of her group—about twenty women—to make her payments, and take part in sessions dedicated to financial decision-making, health topics, domestic violence. With the initial loan, she was able to rent her workroom. With her second loan, of about three hundred and fifty dollars, she bought the bicycle and rebuilt it. She now has a loan of five hundred and fifty dollars, and next time she will ask for six hundred and fifty. She has added empanadas to her repertoire. On a good week, she makes as much as two hundred dollars. Her workroom contained a microwave, a television, and a DVD player. She explained that she had bought these on an installment plan, and that she organizes her week according to her debt obligations—generally, three days to pay the interest on her consumer loans, two days to pay Pro Mujer. Pro Mujer Mexico is a relatively new, small organization; its size, extra services, and the high cost of operating in Mexico result in an annual interest rate (including taxes and other fees) of about eighty-four per cent.

But Chávez didn't find it exorbitant; the poor are accustomed to expensive credit. Chavez said that she never writes any of these figures down, but she was very precise in detailing the various amounts. She said that she had decided she needed a small car, even if it was old. She paused, and then gestured theatrically toward a beat-up white sedan parked outside. She had already bought it! She added that she now wanted a professional oven, with three levels, which the car could transport. She told us that her husband became jealous when she joined Pro Mujer, and wanted her to quit. But her daughter and son-in-law defended her. "My husband said, 'How is it possible that there is a group that allows a woman to feel so independent? What is this group doing?'" She laughed. "It's the machismo—they

want a woman here," she said, pointing to her knee.

She smiled even more broadly, looking around the room at her admiring guests. "I wish my husband could be here, to see me being interviewed," she said.

The broader shift toward the profit model began in the nineties, when Acción International, a network of Latin-American institutions, concluded that commercialization was the only way microfinance could serve large numbers of people, because commercial enterprises could tap the capital markets for the funds they needed to grow. In 1992, Bolivia's BancoSol, an Acción affiliate, transformed itself from a nonprofit into the first private commercial bank in the world dedicated exclusively to microfinance—and dozens of other institutions have followed.

"Acción created the commercial model, and the commercial model is the one that works," the organization's president, Maria Otero, declared. She and Pro Mujer's Carmen Velasco were schoolgirls together in Bolivia, and their fathers were best friends. Now they are on opposite sides of this small, fractious community. "Pro Mujer is performing well, and it could become a commercial bank," Otero told me. "But Carmen believes becoming commercial will dirty you with the 'P' word of profit. She thinks it will compromise the program." Otero thinks that nonprofits don't have much of a future in microfinance.

The debate is about much more than purity of motives. The Yunus faction worries about "mission drift," saying that, as the drive for profitability increases, only the so-called "less poor" (as opposed to the very poor) will qualify for loans. "On the one side, there are the people saying, essentially, We want to be Citigroup for poor people," said Jonathan Lewis, the C.E.O. of MicroCredit Enterprises, which provides loan guarantees from wealthy donors to institutions that serve mainly the poorest women. "But, on the other side, we're saying, We didn't start this to become a bank. We started this to end poverty. So we're going to experiment with all the different ways, profitable or not, that we can work with our constituencies—who are our customers, not our shareholders. If your core mission is to provide a channel out of desperate pov-

erty, it creates a different set of questions than if your mission is to create a global market in microfinance futures."

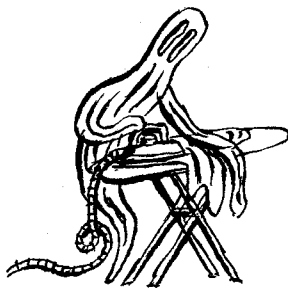
Hyperbole distorts the debate on both sides. Muhammad Yunus speaks eloquently about eradicating poverty, but some advocates of commercialization argue that microcredit burdens the very poor with debt, and that the less poor are the only appropriate customers. Since relatively few rigorous studies on the impact of microfinance have been completed, ideology tends to dominate. Jonathan Morduch, a professor of public policy and economics at New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, who has studied the field for more than a decade, said that there is clear evidence that microfinance can help the very poor, but he added that "credit alone is not a panacea." He emphasized the success of groups that combine lending with other initiatives, such as education and health care. And although the lives of individuals have improved, loans to the poor have not yet had a demonstrable effect on aggregate poverty levels. "The boldest claim for microfinance—that it can single-handedly eliminate a large share of world poverty—outpaces, by a long distance, the evidence accumulated to date," Morduch told me.

After the announcement of Yunus's Nobel Prize, some in the microfinance community worried that exaggerated claims about microfinance would lead eventually—when unrealistic expectations were not met—to the discrediting of the field. Outside critics have argued that microfinance is merely a palliative measure, which does nothing to bring about the large societal reforms necessary to reduce poverty—and even serves to preserve the status quo, by making the lives of the poor more tolerable. "That is a valid critique, to a point," Morduch said. "But get real. How long are you willing to wait for the revolution? I can't see any moral foundation for not trying to address the current de-

privations of the world's poorest billions. If microfinance can help provide options in cost-effective ways, we should celebrate it."

The United Nations designated 2005 the International Year of Microcredit, and this was primarily intended to encourage policymakers to support favorable regulatory environments. But even the title provoked bitter fighting. Shouldn't it be the Year of Microfinance? Acción and other profit-minded groups demanded that the name be changed. So did a World Bank affiliate, the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), a consortium of government and private development organizations working to expand microfinance. When CGAP was created, in 1995, the "P" stood for "poorest"—something for which Yunus had lobbied hard. In 2003, "poorest" was replaced with "poor." ("Their explanation was that the poorest can't handle credit, so we should be looking only at the upper part of the poor," Yunus said. "That was absolutely against the intention of the creation of CGAP.") In the end, at the insistence of developing countries—Bangladesh in particular—"microcredit" retained its place in the name, but Secretary-General Kofi Annan used the word "microfinance" in his opening statement.

A few years ago, Pierre Omidyar left Silicon Valley and moved his family to Henderson, Nevada, just outside Las Vegas. A slight, unprepossessing figure with hints of gray in his wavy black hair, he tends to think aloud, following desultory paths, looking for theoretical solutions to problems. If anything, his approach has become more abstract over the years. As a young software engineer, he solved problems as they arose, but now he likes to reflect on the nature of the eBay phenomenon and how it supports his philosophy. He often cites Adam Smith's doctrine that unrestrained market forces and self-interest drive the most efficient—and socially beneficial—use of resources. Omidyar sees Smith's principles at work in eBay; he believes that eBay's commercial success was linked to a profound social good. "I did an early investors' road show in the fall of 1997, and I went to New York and talked to some Wall Street folks, and I said, O.K., this is strangers from all over the country, sometimes internationally, and



they're doing business together over the Internet. And people were shaking their heads. "That'll never work! It's impossible! You can't trust anybody—you're going to get ripped off!" Now, he says, eBay has taught "more than two hundred million people that they can trust a complete stranger." Omidyar told me that he believes the trust that was inculcated on eBay has carried over to other online sites and, perhaps, to real-life interactions as well. "People have learned that, in general, people are basically good. And we've demonstrated that."

Omidyar believes that eBay had another powerful social impact. "I remember in early focus groups, when I started meeting some of our customers, there was a housewife who had sort of accidentally begun to sell things on eBay. She went to flea markets, bought things for a quarter, put them online, and sold them for twenty-five dollars, and she said, 'Wow!' She said, 'Now I finally feel like I'm contributing to the household.' So that's an incredibly empowering thing, when an individual discovers his or her own ability to generate economic value." He added, "There are three-quarters of a million people or more who make their living selling on eBay."

His frustration with the traditional philanthropic world eventually resulted in what one of his colleagues described as an "Aha!" moment. eBay would be his template for the future. In 2004, he founded Omidyar Network, which makes for-profit investments as well as philanthropic donations, and as he began to search for vehicles with eBay-like properties he decided that microfinance was an amazing fit. Both eBay and microfinance allow people to discover that they can be entrepreneurs. Both are based on trust. Both can be viewed as demonstrations of free-market principles. Both can be seen as businesses whose profitability is linked to their social impact. Omidyar stopped talking about microfinance as a way to end world poverty, and instead described its mission in a way congruent with the eBay experience.

Indeed, when Omidyar was invited to participate, with Yunus, on a panel on poverty alleviation at the Clinton Global Initiative conference in September, 2005, he and his colleagues at Omidyar Network debated for some time about

whether he should accept. Would it send the wrong message? Ultimately, he did go, but one of his first statements was "For us, it's not just about alleviating poverty; it's about economic self-empowerment." Omidyar told me that in the two years or so since he became involved in microfinance he had not visited a microfinance institution or met a borrower. Just the opposite of Yunus's entry into microfinance: Yunus left theory behind to listen to the poor, and Omidyar seems to rely largely on theory. Omidyar sees himself as an agent of global change—in this case, the commercialization of the microfinance sector. Hence his insistence that his hundred-million-dollar gift to Tufts be invested in ways that will promote that commercialization.

"Pierre takes his role in the world quite seriously," Lawrence Bacow, the president of Tufts, told me in his office recently. He pointed to the hundred-million-dollar eBay stock-transfer certificate, framed and hanging on the wall

in his office. "He changed the world once, with eBay. And he wants to change the world again."

In 2005, Citigroup, the largest banking network in the world, launched a microfinance business division. At the time, Robert Annibale, who is now the division's global director, said that two and a half billion people had never used a bank: "Forty per cent of the world is beyond the world we know."

Stanley Fischer, a former World Bank official who was then the president of Citigroup International and now heads the Bank of Israel, told Citigroup senior management that the microfinance division would try to earn a reasonable rate of return. But he also said that "although there were very high rates of return being earned in this industry—we'd heard that companies were making forty and fifty per cent—a company like Citigroup could not, from a public-relations viewpoint, go out there and maximize return on capital, nor would we want to." (Clearly,

ODE AND ELEGY

A thud. Shrieks. Frantic wingbeats, like a round of soft applause. The hawk jumps on top of the jay knocked to the grass. Stabilizing himself by pressing his wings to the ground, he digs his claws into the jay's back, strikes the neck over and over, scattering blue feathers. Then, as easily as a green wave in heavy seas lifts a small boat and throws it upside down, still afloat but keel up, so the hawk flips the jay, then rips at his throat.

A blue wing wrests itself free, flaps like a flag saying *I will fight you!* The hawk stuffs the wing back down into place and clamps it there with one foot. Now jay and hawk stare at each other beak to beak, as close as Jesus and Judas at their kiss. The hawk strikes, the jay struggles,

but his neck is broken, his eyes
shrink to beads of taxidermist's glass.

As a grape harvester tramples out
the last juices of grape, so the hawk
treads the jay's body up and down
and down and up. He places
a foot on the throat and a foot
on the belly, flaps his wings,
repositions his feet, flaps again,
then, the cere above his beak
flushed hard yellow from exertion,
pushes off, clutching transversely
the body of the jay, like a coffin made
in the shape and color of the dead.

Much as in *le décollage à l'américain*
of the Lafayette Escadrille, when
the pilots flew a few yards off the ground
for a long time to gain speed, then
pulled back hard on the joystick,
just so the sharp-shinned hawk,
lugging his blue load glinting in sun-
light close down to the tarmac,
now suddenly climbs at an abrupt
angle and soars over the tops
of the Norway spruce and the tamarack.

—Galway Kinnell

engaging in microfinance might help Citigroup with regulators, too—but not if it looked as if it were profiteering from the poor.) Fischer argued that many of these microfinance clients would develop economically and become a whole new client base for Citigroup.

Annibale insists that the challenge of reaching the “un-banked” is so vast that there is room for every approach: profitable, sustainable, and subsidized. But he is a commercial banker, and he talks not about reducing poverty but about “financial inclusion.” By this he means retail banking for the poor, which includes not only loans and savings accounts but also insurance and remittances. “Hopefully, one day, ‘microfinance’ will kind of go away, and we’ll talk about who’s providing financial services to whom,” Annibale said. “Is it people living on three dollars a day that the banks should serve, and those on two dollars a day that the nonprofit microfinance institutions should serve? I don’t really have a clear view, but I do think that what

we’re really talking about is just expanding access to financial services.” (Technology should speed that advance. In India, Citi has begun to install A.T.M.s in microfinance institutions, and clients will be able to open Citi savings accounts, with no minimum balance; the machines, which can identify clients by their fingerprints, will speak to them in any of six dialects.) For his part, Annibale said, “I want to treat somebody as a client, not like a beneficiary of a donation. Because when we have someone that we psychologically think of now as a client we say, ‘How are we going to satisfy them?’ If you’re just going to give money, it’s very different.”

In the past several years, Citigroup and its subsidiary Banamex raised seventy million dollars in the capital markets for the Acción affiliate Compartamos, the largest microfinance institution in Latin America, with more than five hundred thousand clients. This June, Compartamos became a fully regulated bank. “The only way to have massive impact is to do it

profitably,” Compartamos’s co-C.E.O. Carlos Labarthe declared. “As an N.G.O., getting donations, we were not able to grow. But when you are able to go to the market, then the sky’s the limit.” Labarthe said that Compartamos now has access to two hundred million dollars in the market. In five years, he predicted, eighty to ninety per cent of all microfinance institutions will be for-profit institutions.

I interviewed Labarthe and his partner, Carlos Danel, in their offices at the Compartamos headquarters, in a tall glass building in Mexico City. The “two Carloses,” as they are known, started Compartamos in 1990, operating mainly in the poor southeastern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas. Both came from prosperous Mexican families, and graduated from conservative universities; in the early years, much of their funding came from members of Gente Nueva, a network of nonprofit organizations. Labarthe, a genial, expansive man who was wearing a white shirt, unbuttoned at the chest, and a large silver cross, told me that he attributes much of Compartamos’s success to the partners’ corporate sense of purpose. In 1993, when they had only three hundred clients, they took a close look at the Grameen Bank. “We had then the vision that this can really explode and be huge,” he said.

It was the size of Grameen—not Yunus’s philosophy—that excited them. “Muhammad Yunus always has said that credit is a human right,” Labarthe said, his voice tinged with sarcasm. “Well, I don’t believe that. Opportunity is a human right, education—but credit is for the one that has an opportunity to make something productive with that. This is in a way creating wealth, more than wiping out poverty. Not bringing up the destitute.” I asked what he thought of the Grameen Bank’s program of loans to beggars, which enables them to sell small items door to door. Yunus charges them no interest, cross-subsidizing their loans with interest paid by other borrowers. Labarthe waved a hand dismissively. “There’s no interest and no payment schedule—it’s a local grant.” Compartamos’s target population, on the other hand, is, he said, “what some call the working poor—people who are well nourished, a level of well-being that allows them to engage in economic activity. We believe that that is where microfinance is effective.”

Compartamos's loan model is simple credit; it does not provide sessions on family planning or domestic violence or women's empowerment. Even though the company lends predominantly to women, Labarthe emphasized that "it is not a philosophical thing; it is very practical." He pointed to the Grameen Bank's "Sixteen Decisions"—a collection of resolutions made by borrowers, which include planning for smaller families and forswearing the dowry system, in which daughters, particularly in very poor families, are viewed as burdens. "They clearly have a cultural agenda," Labarthe said. At Compartamos, they lent to women at the start not only because they knew women were more reliable borrowers but also because in many villages most of the men had emigrated to the United States, and the women were the heads of household. In the past five years, as they expanded to urban areas, they have been lending to men as well.

More than seventy per cent of Mexico's population lacks access to banks, and there were no other major providers of microfinance. Compartamos "became a virtual McDonald's of village banking," wrote Jonathan Schlefer, in a 2004 case study for the Kennedy School of Government. "A near monopoly offering one product in one market."

That lack of competition has helped enable Compartamos to charge interest rates that are breathtakingly high, even in the world of microfinance. For most loans, Labarthe explained, Compartamos borrowers pay an annual rate of a hundred and five per cent in interest and taxes. Some rates, when adjusted to reflect their real costs, are higher than a hundred and twenty per cent. (Labarthe predicts these numbers will go down.) Recently, the Mexican central bank issued regulations that forced credit providers to clearly state the actual amount that a borrower will pay in interest, commissions, and fees, and Compartamos is making a better effort to explain hidden costs to clients.

CGAP has stated that some microfinance institutions are more profitable than commercial banks, and Compartamos belongs to that category, in part because of its extraordinarily high rates. Danel and Labarthe expect to double their client base by 2008, to a million. And when Fidel Castro dies they plan to take Compartamos to Cuba. At the

time I met with them, they had just returned from Washington, D.C., where they had presented their proposal to an official at the Inter-American Development Bank, which, according to one of their bankers, was "very enthusiastic." But, given U.S.-Cuba relations, the banker added, it was agreed that the United States would remain in the background of this enterprise.

"Now that we can tap into the markets, many banks, finance companies, and private investors are looking at Compartamos, and they're seeing this is good business," Labarthe said. "Before, the poor were always thought of as the problem of the private sector. But now they can be an opportunity."

Last year, when Lawrence Bacow first explained to the Tufts trustees that Omidyar had insisted that the university create a separate fund for his gift which would invest only in microfinance, some of the trustees said, "We're going to do what?" They were worried about the extreme "immaturity" of the sector—data on returns are poorly documented, information about different investment vehicles is not easily accessible, currency risk in investments is endemic, and ways of exiting the market (that is, finding a buyer when one wants to sell) are limited, at best. In the end, though, Omidyar's hundred-million-dollar proposition had proved irresistible.

The Omidyar-Tufts Microfinance Fund's goal—in line with the rest of the Tufts endowment—was a return of at least nine per cent. But there are not many places to obtain that reward in the microfinance world.

"We've discovered that a hundred million dollars might be difficult to place," Omidyar told me. The problem was with the microfinance institutions themselves, many of which weren't yet sufficiently evolved or profitable. "The rhetoric is ahead of the reality," Omidyar said. "When people are saying, 'We are commercially viable'—well, they're not really commercially viable." He now hopes that the fund will serve as a "carrot," so that institutions hungry for capital will get rigorous in the hope of becoming eligible. The return, if achieved, will draw other investors into the market. Omidyar views the fund as a way of testing his theories about commercializing the sector. "It's really the demonstra-

tion impact I'm looking for, primarily," he said. Currently, much of the fund is sitting in short-term investments, waiting to be disbursed.

There are good reasons to wait. The stars of the commercial microfinance world—financially and operationally strong institutions like Compartamos—make up only a small percentage of all microfinance institutions. The best performers are the most popular, favored not only by investors but by donors, too. (According to CGAP, eighty per cent of all funding goes to the same twenty institutions.) Omidyar and his colleagues say that the biggest obstacle to commercialization of the sector is philanthropic capital. They say that it distorts the market—not only by filling channels that might otherwise draw commercial investors but also by keeping unsustainable programs alive. "One of the things we need and we will get is a cycle of creative destruction," said Tryfan Evans, the director of investments at the Omidyar-Tufts fund, who previously worked at U.S.A.I.D. "If you're inefficient, you will get overtaken by competitors." Evans said that he is confident about achieving the fund's goal of nine per cent—and more. (His bonus depends on that.) The fund plans to be fully invested within three years.

"I would love investors and donors to really think about this," Omidyar said, earnestly. "There is a difference between undemanding capital"—contributed by donors, who expect nothing in return—"and demanding capital," which requires transparency of financial reporting and an appropriate reward for risk. His goal, he says, is "to shrink the undemanding source of capital and grow the other." That mission, however, might be complicated by the recent entry of some of his colleagues in the technology community, including Bill Gates, Michael Dell, Sergey Brin, and Larry Page. Omidyar believes that there is a role for philanthropic capital in carefully delineated areas like funding research and building infrastructure. But if these foundations commit large sums to other kinds of enterprises—as the Gates Foundation did in its grant to Pro Mujer, a microfinance organization that Omidyar told me he would not support—then his effort could become more difficult. The "cycle of creative destruction" might be slowed. Regarding his colleagues' grants, Omidyar said, somewhat stiffly, "I would

hope that businesspeople would see the value of a business-oriented approach."

"The Omidyar fund represents a faith-based belief in the market," Jonathan Lewis, of MicroCredit Enterprises, said. And, in all the excitement about what the market can offer, hard questions have been obscured. Individual borrower repayment rates are excellent, he added, but there are few statistics available for default rates of microfinance institutions; if an institution defaults, how will investors get their equity out without hurting the institution's clients? "Someday, people will have to cross a Rubicon, because there will be events like foreclosures," Lewis said. "Will the president of Tufts and Pierre Omidyar, when they are waiting for a liquidity event, say to thirty-seven thousand women, 'Sorry, we're closing down and you're going to lose your loans—so go back to feeding your kids twice a day?'"

For that matter, will *any* interest rates paid by very poor women to rich investors be deemed too high? The issue of interest rates arose last March in the state of Andhra Pradesh, known as India's capital of microfinance, where a number of women borrowers committed suicide. The link between the suicides and the lenders (one was SHARE, a Grameen Foundation partner) has not been definitively established, and the question of whether abuses occurred has become highly controversial. Microfinance has been growing at a furious rate in the past couple of years in Andhra Pradesh, with intense competition between private institutions and a state-sponsored program. The government and its supporters accused microfinance groups in the province of charging exorbitant rates and of bullying clients who were overextended and unable to repay their loans. Microfinance groups claim that the suicides were largely incidental to their activities, and that the deaths were exploited by the government to dampen private competition. The rates among the microfinance groups varied; some were about thirty per cent, but, because of the way they were structured, and because of various hidden costs, they had appeared to be much less. Today, the private microfinance institutions in Andhra Pradesh have lowered their rates—a few are as low as eleven per cent—and have adopted codes of conduct. Opposing sides in the commercialization debate drew different lessons from the episode. For

Yunus's allies, it demonstrates how the emphasis on profit can blind lenders to social values; the other side worries that rates lowered for political rather than economic reasons probably aren't sustainable. What nearly everyone can agree on, though, is that it is a reminder of the dangers facing this immature and rapidly growing field.

The Omidyar-Tufts fund has invested in a Frankfurt-based banking network called ProCredit Holding, which is managed by a former German radical of the generation of 1968 named C. P. Zeiting. His goal today, he says, is to found banks for what he calls "ordinary people." With grants from international financial institutions and from the U.S. government (totalling about fifty million dollars in the past eight years), he has built a network of nineteen banks in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa; he plans to expand the network into Colombia, Honduras, Sierra Leone, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Mexico (where he looks forward to competing with Compartamos). After a few years, the banks are expected to start operating on their own. Of the nineteen existing banks, Zeiting says, eighteen are profitable. Zeiting's forte is high-risk areas where he is freer to impose order. He pointed to the recently opened ProCredit bank in Congo. "Someone wanted to make a ten-thousand-dollar deposit, and he tried to give a fifty-dollar

bribe—to make a deposit! It is part of their cultural heritage, you might say. We try to build up a different culture—Protestant ethics."

Chain-smoking, irascible, erupting every so often in short bursts of indignation, Zeiting is impatient with questions about microfinance's serving the poor. "In a way, I don't want to belong to that world. It is a field occupied by 'visionaries' who are actually politicians. 'Credit is a human right'! Can we please remember that credit means you owe something and you can get overly indebted?"

He went on, "It is an altogether different thing than what we do. We say, These are banks for ordinary people. That means everybody who does not have access to the financial system. I want to stabilize the middle class in these countries as well. I want to be a different type of banker. But I only want to be a banker, not a microfinance banker. Yunus is against banks. He is for social revolution.

"Museum of poverty!" he muttered. "It's ridiculous! To claim that microfinance is going to solve poverty is a myth. From ancient Greece to today, poverty has been with us and it will occupy us forever."

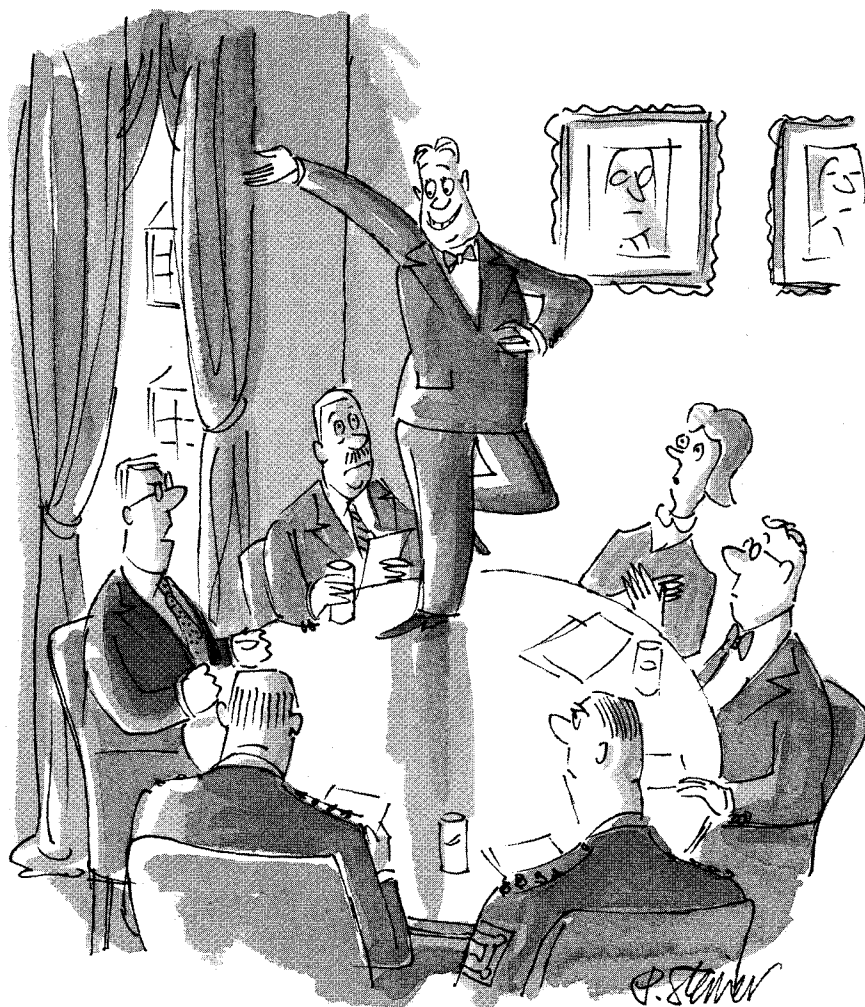
Zealous as he is about his commercial approach, Zeiting thinks that the role of philanthropic capital has been too widely denigrated. For one thing, notwithstanding his banks' profitability, he is still trying to obtain more grant money,

Strange Aftertaste.

BIRTHDAY CARDS



R. C. W.



"Agreed, there's a middle ground between stay the course and cut and run. But I'm quite certain it's not dance and flirt."

for expanding into new, harder-to-serve rural regions. He also said, "We don't want to be the only M.F.I.s in the world. There need to be others. But if you look at the level behind us, there aren't enough scale players. What's going to make the difference there? Strategic investment of grant money, linked to investors who don't have fixed demands on returns."

Zeitinger believes that Omidyar's resistance to the use of grant money in microfinance is naïve. "He will not learn unless he is engaged, seduced rationally, to change his thinking."

One of the proposals under consideration by the Gates Foundation is Zeitinger's request for a major grant to enable him to expand into rural Africa. Omidyar's fund of a hundred million dollars generated great excitement initially, but it has since been somewhat over-

shadowed both by the expected size of the Gates Foundation's commitment—thought to be as much as several hundred million dollars annually—and the breadth of the Gates approach. "It's not so much a debate between a Compartamos or a Pro Mujer model," Rajiv Shah, at Gates, said. "You need a range of different business models. Some are going to be very commercial." Some, he noted, will be commercial eventually but not right away. And others will need some degree of continued support, in order to reach the destitute and specific communities in certain parts of the world. Shah said that Gates is giving grants and loans, and even making investments, to reach its goal of moving hundreds of millions out of poverty. "But the goal is always that—it's not to get a return. That distinction is important, because Omidyar has taken a different approach."

The Gates Foundation's approach is notable for its catholicism—not only within the field of microfinance but in its over-all program, aimed at reducing inequities around the world, which includes global health, education, and agricultural production as well as financial services for the poor. The Gates staff conducted an intensive study of microfinance for about a year before Bill Gates formally made the initiative part of his foundation's portfolio. What stirred him was a visit last December to BRAC, Bangladesh's largest micro-lender and the largest national nonprofit in the world. In its offerings to its clients, BRAC provides not only financial services but also schools, legal training, and help with marketing. Its subsidiaries offer dairy products, textiles, and crafts—all produced by borrowers. BRAC makes the Grameen Bank look spare.

In early May, representatives from eight microfinance institutions around the world were invited to a three-day event at the Gates Foundation's headquarters, in Seattle; among them were Carmen Velasco, of Pro Mujer; Maria Otero, of Acción; and Ingrid Munro, the founder and executive director of an organization called Jamii Bora, which serves the very poor in the slums of Nairobi. "We wanted to hear from people who have had a lot of firsthand experience, and we wanted to bring people from different geographies together," Rajiv Shah said, noting that the visitors came from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. "When you do that, you realize there are very different approaches to this, and certainly there are few right answers in terms of one approach versus another when you look broadly across a big part of the globe." For instance, in the case of Ingrid Munro and Jamii Bora, he said, "Is Citigroup ever going to securitize her loan portfolio? Probably not. Is she going to be wildly profitable, to the point where she's spitting off the kinds of dividends Compartamos spits off? I doubt it. But she can sustainably provide important services that are helping to move people out of poverty in the heart of a very poor community. So shouldn't she also have the ability to innovate and reach scale?"

At one point, the group met with Melinda and Bill Gates, and with Warren Buffett, too. It was several weeks before Buffett would announce that he was giving roughly thirty-one billion dollars to the Gates Foundation; the guests as-

sumed that he just happened to be visiting Bill and was curious about microfinance. Buffett asked incisive questions about interest and repayment rates—and dazzled several of those present with the speed with which he ran the numbers in his head.

Acción and Pro Mujer were both already Gates grantees, but Jamii Bora was a newcomer. Munro started it in 1999, and today it is the fastest-growing microfinance institution in Kenya. Munro is from Sweden and her husband from Canada, but they have lived in Kenya for the past twenty-one years. In 1988, they adopted a boy from the streets. “It was a small seven-year-old boy who more or less adopted us,” she said, chuckling. “And then we later found his two brothers and adopted them. With a situation like that, like in all great love stories, in literature and in real life, you are a helpless victim, you know?” Through her sons, she got to know other street children, and their mothers, who were beggars. She was the head of the African Housing Fund, which works with the homeless. “When I retired from the African Housing Fund, the beggars kept coming to my house and banging on the door, and they said, ‘You can’t abandon us now, Mum, you are our mother.’ So they really challenged me, and I said, ‘O.K., if you want me to do something for you, now you have to do something for yourself.’ I challenged them to save a little bit of money. ‘For every shilling you save, I promise, I will find somebody who will give two shillings, and then you can borrow twice as much as you’ve saved.’”

“The unique thing is, then, that it started with trust,” she said—sounding like Pierre Omidyar, her doctrinal opposite. “Also, I thought it was just a small club, a group of women I thought were very special. But, really, it grew like a bushfire! After a few months, we had to formalize it. We decided to call it Jamii Bora—*jamii bora* means ‘good families’ in Swahili. And that’s what we say—you can be very poor but you’re still a good family, and you still have the talent to get out of poverty.”

Munro started with a group of fifty beggars from the slums of Nairobi, and over the past seven years Jamii Bora has expanded to sixty-one branches, serving about a hundred and thirty thousand members; Munro aims to reach at least

five hundred thousand by 2009. She says that she has stuck to the original idea, “that you can borrow twice as much as you’ve saved—which means we have a very strong foundation, because we have a lot of savings, and our members take very small risks.” Jamii Bora has received some grants, but it largely pays for itself. About a third of its borrowers are men. And nearly all of its staff members are former borrowers or their relatives.

This is important, Munro said. Some microfinance organizations in Kenya will not open an office in the worst slums. “My staff is not afraid, because they were born in the very same slum, and the thugs and thieves were their classmates in primary school. I don’t agree at all with those who say you can’t reach the very desperate with microfinance. But you have to be involved—*really* involved, you know? You can’t just sit there in the bank and wait for them to come in.”

Munro emphasized that she continues to work with the poorest of the poor. “Very few in microfinance do that, because it costs just as much to administer a loan of twenty dollars as two hundred dollars, or two thousand—but, of course, the income from a twenty-dollar loan is very small. Our average loan is ninety-five dollars.”

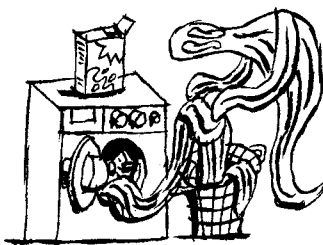
Munro added housing loans, health insurance, and life insurance to her services. About a year after she started Jamii Bora, she realized that when clients defaulted on their loan repayments it was usually because a family member had been hospitalized. No insurance company would offer an affordable policy to her borrowers, so Munro decided to do it herself. “We charge about twelve dollars a year for an adult member, with a maximum number of four kids. After that, it’s an extra few dollars for each kid. There is no upper limit on cost, and we don’t exclude people with H.I.V. and AIDS. And we’re covering our costs and have never used donor money on our health insurance.”

Munro’s latest project is to build a town

on a two-hundred-and-ninety-three-acre parcel of land near Nairobi. It will include housing, a town center with shops, a school, a hospital, and a small industrial area, and some two thousand Jamii Bora families will live and work there. About two years ago, local groups seeking to block the project obtained a ruling from an environmental-management authority to the effect that the development would have a negative impact on wildlife; that ruling has since been overturned, but now it has been appealed to the high court. “It’s the classic thing that rich people don’t want to have poor people around,” Munro said. “But you can never finally get out of poverty if you can’t get out of those slums.” She hopes for a decision before the end of the year.

Although most of Jamii Bora’s loans are very small, loans as large as nine or ten thousand dollars are available to exemplary long-term clients. “Among the very poorest of the poor, you have some absolutely outstanding, brilliant people, who would have been top executives anywhere if they’d had the chance to go to school,” Munro says. She likes to cite a woman named Claris Adhiambo, one of Munro’s original group of fifty beggars, whose husband drove her out of their home after she gave birth to her fifth child. Adhiambo saved sixteen dollars and borrowed thirty-two dollars to open a food stall, selling fish. Three years later, she became a wholesaler and opened a restaurant. She bought land and built a small rooming house and small stores. She has repaid eleven loans, and her current loan is for thirty-two hundred dollars. “If you were to see her today, she looks like a member of parliament—you can’t believe she was a beggar!”

Munro said that Melinda Gates would be impressed if she came to Kenya and saw Jamii Bora in action. “Because that is the time you really understand. You know, when people visit the worst kinds of slums—even worse than anyone can imagine—and they walk around and meet people in their little businesses and little homes, almost always, their first comment is ‘Why are they so happy?’ They are smiling, proud, with dignity, showing what they have achieved. And I say, ‘It’s because they have something today which they didn’t have a month ago, and they have a plan and dream of something they’re going to have in a month’s time that they don’t have today.’” ♦



THE SHOW-WOMAN

Suzan-Lori Parks's idea for the largest theatre collaboration ever.

BY HILTON ALS

Down in the gray-green gloom of the New York City subway system, anything can happen, and frequently does. A bit of hucksterism. Alms for the poor. Sometimes, even unsuspecting critics have to field questions from that rarest of birds, the black female playwright. Late one night in 1987, on the way home from an event at Franklin Furnace, an avant-garde arts center, the writer and theatre critic Alisa Solomon was riding the subway, minding her own business, when a young black woman approached her. "I saw you at the theatre, so I was kinda hoping I could ask you a question," she said, and sat down next to Solomon, who described the encounter in the *Village Voice* two years later. The woman leaned in "uncomfortably close," before adding, "I'm trying to ask anyone who might know. I'm a playwright. Do you know where I can send my scripts? They're kind of unconventional."

That young woman—Suzan-Lori Parks—has since become renowned for her audacity, both on the page and in the world. The author of nine full-length plays, most of which are taught at drama schools across the country, and one of the founders of a wave of multi-layered, historically aware, and linguistically complicated theatre, she aims to defeat what she calls "the Theatre of Schmaltz"—"the play-as-wrapping-paper-version-of-hot-newspaper-headline." Parks was the first black woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for drama—for her 2001 play, *Topdog/Underdog*—after having been short-listed for "In the Blood," her 1999 reimagining of "The Scarlet Letter." A writer who crosses cultural boundaries, as well as social ones, she has had her work produced everywhere, from the smallest avant-garde stages to Broadway. Her voice is both idiosyncratic and eerily familiar, one of

few in the popular theatre to fully exploit the power of spoken black English. (A typical passage from one of her plays reads like this: "In my day my motherud say 16:15 and there wernt no question that it was 16:15 her time. Thuh time helpin tuh tell you where you oughta be where you oughta be lookin and whatcha oughta be lookin at.")

Perhaps Parks's willingness to, as she might put it, "show her ass" without apology is something she picked up from one of her heroes, the singer Josephine Baker, whose famous attitude she wrote about in a 1995 essay:

Legend has it that when Josephine Baker hit Paris in the '20s, she "just wiggled her fanny and all the French fell in love with her." ... [But] there was a hell of a lot behind that wiggling bottom. Check it: Baker was from America and left it; African-Americans are on the bottom of the heap in America; we are at the bottom on the bottom, practically the bottom itself, and Baker rose to the top by shaking her bottom.

Like Baker, Parks, who was nicknamed LedgeButt as a child, believes in making use of what you've got, even if all you've got is a belief in yourself. Much in demand as a kind of inspirational speaker on the college lecture circuit, she told me last winter, "I love my lecture tours. I get up onstage. I have my stack of books and a glass of water and a microphone. No podium, no distance between me and the audience, and I just talk to people and get all excited and tell a lot of jokes, and sing some songs, and read from my work and remind people how powerful they are and how beautiful they are."

In September, she taught a master class in drama at Northeastern Illinois University, in Chicago. Seated before a small crowd of future playwrights, in an army-green miniskirt, Parks summed up her philosophy this way: "The writer has two kinds of faith: actual writing and sitting openly. Have faith in your personal

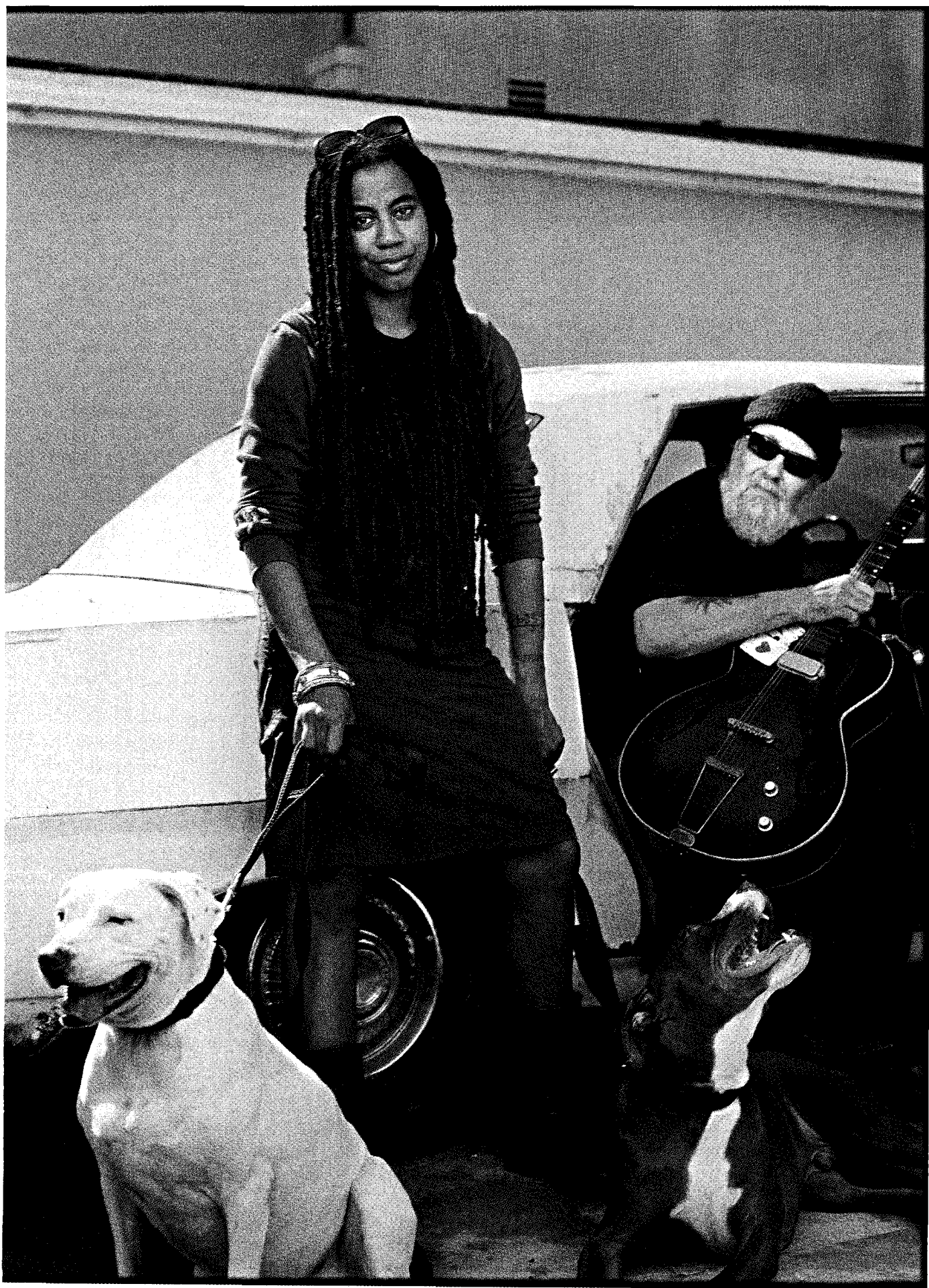
effort or sweat. And faith in God, or whatever you want to call it. Then the voices will come." She paused. "Faith is the big deal," she said.

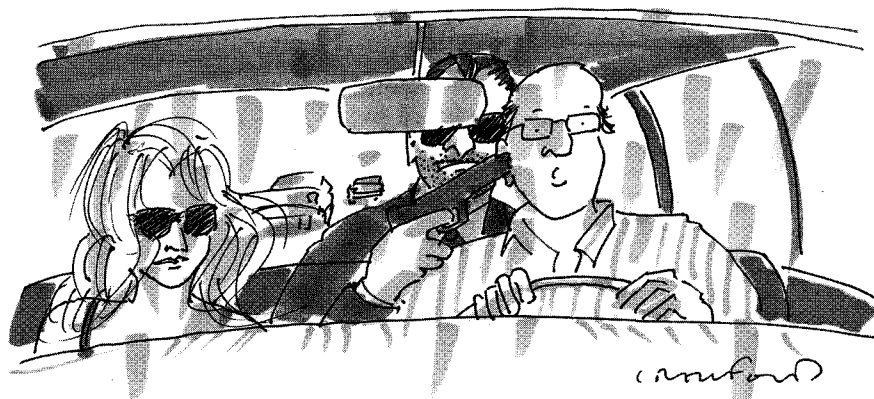
Parks's faith in her most ambitious project to date, "365 Days/365 Plays," was the driving force behind a meeting that she called one morning last January. The project, a yearlong, nationwide staging of a series of very short plays that Parks wrote in the course of a year, will launch on November 13th, and will involve nearly seven hundred theatres, in more than thirty cities; back in January, however, it was still in the early stages of development.

As the forty-two-year-old Parks walked toward the Cow's End, a two-story coffeehouse on Washington Boulevard in Venice, California, where she has lived for the past six years, she seemed entirely unaware of the soccer moms and skateboarders pausing to take in the sight of her. It was hard to tell what caught their attention most: her nearly waist-length dreadlocks, her milk-colored face with its generous mouth, wide nose, and large brown eyes, or her big hoop earrings and black, calf-high motorcycle boots. Trailed by Bonnie Metzgar, the associate artistic director of Denver's Curious Theatre, and Ben Cameron, then the executive director of the Theatre Communications Group, which publishes her plays, Parks took a seat at a battered table in the coffeehouse's atrium and began to explain the genesis of "365 Days/365 Plays." Metzgar had already agreed to be a producer of the project. She and Parks hoped that Cameron, given his expertise in the labyrinthine world of arts funding, would offer some help or advice.

In the theatre, seduction is everything. As Parks spoke, she dropped in improvised bits of girlish business—her

Parks with her husband, Paul Oscher, at their home in Venice, California. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.





"Go ahead, shoot me! It'll take the guesswork out of my day."

face taking on a deliberate vagueness of expression as she tied and untied her dreadlocks or stared softly out into space—which made the conversation look and sound not unlike a play written by Suzan-Lori Parks:

PARKS: We have this whole spiel thing we do. O.K., right, so—

CAMERON: Is this like "The Producers"? Are you two like Nathan Lane and—

PARKS: No, I'm not like Nathan Lane. I'm the girl in the white dress.

CAMERON: Uma Thurman.

PARKS: Right, right. I sit on the piano or something and go, "Come up and see me sometime," or whatever she says. Anyway, about three years ago I was hanging around doing nothing and I said to Paul, my husband, "Gosh, you know, I should write a play. I'm going to write a play a day for a whole year." And I started laughing, which is always a good sign that I'm possessed by an evil demon. And he said, "Well, you know, that would be cool." And I said, "Really?" And he said, "Yeah, that would be cool." So I said, "O.K., I'll start in January," and then I thought, No! I'll start right now. It was the thirteenth of November, the eleventh or twelfth, whatever day it was. So I ran upstairs and I began. And I kept going, through whatever I was doing. I went on a book tour, we might have opened a play—I don't know what we were doing. "Topdog" opened in London. . . .

METZGAR: We went to war.

PARKS: Right, we went to war. Well,

we didn't go, but we sent some flunkies to do the business.

CAMERON: They're still there.

PARKS: Right. We opened "Topdog" in London; various people died, like Gregory Hines and some of the flunkies. And all along I was writing a play every day, whatever happened. Whether I was busy or not, whether it was good or not, whether it was convenient or not. Whatever happened. And it became this prayer, almost. To theatre. To life. To the art process, the process of making art and being alive. It sort of took over my whole year. . . . Sometimes I would write it in the security line at the airport, you know? . . . A lot of them were written in hotels. . . . I didn't limit the time. I sat down and did it and then kind of went on with the day. And then I was finished and I was very proud of myself. And I basically put it in this drawer and didn't think about it too much afterward. . . . And then comes Bonnie Metzgar, and we're hanging out in Denver, blah-blah-blah—and I was just floored by her directing. And she said, "What are you doing? What are those plays doing? Where are the rest of the plays?" I said, "They're sitting in a drawer," whatever. But she said, "No, no, we should do them." And I'm, like, "Yeah, yeah." But she goes, "Noooo!" And eventually we decided that this was what we should do: a seven-city simultaneous world premiere of the plays. We'd have hub theatres, and we'd have each hub theatre reaching out to theatres in that city, and it's this seven-city simultaneous thing.

METZGAR: And Suzan and I will try

to get out the word so that school groups and libraries—

PARKS: Colleges, universities.

METZGAR: Right. Theatre groups, museums, whatever places have—

PARKS: Theatre groups that do plays in languages other than English.

METZGAR: Right.

PARKS: They can translate them if they want. Do it in Spanish, do it in Tagalog. Go for it.

METZGAR: And hopefully some theatre companies will say, "I'm going to do it for free at noon at Grand Central station." And some places will say, "We're going to do it like a prayer in the lobby before the show." So everyone will do it differently, and hopefully some people will say, "I'm going to do it mainstage at the opera house." And that diversity is as much a celebration of the breadth of the community as it is of the different kinds of plays they're doing. The goal is to have the largest shared premiere ever in the history of anything. And possibly the largest art collaboration of any kind. That's the potential.

Parks's Zen-like, sometimes distracted charm (she is a devoted practitioner of Ashtanga yoga) was the perfect counterpart to Metzgar's businesslike focus. After Cameron had laid out what he saw as the possibilities for funding—or the lack thereof—Metzgar turned to him. "We really feel like if there's anyone who can hear this kind of idea and help us to make it into reality, then it would be you," she said.

"What delusional drugs are you on?" Cameron replied.

Afterward, Parks, unfazed, talked about her own hopes for the project. "I don't care what anybody says," she told me. "Stick to the spirit of the play and you're doing it right. It's about embracing the spirit of the text instead of noodling some idea about things."

A few days later, we sat in the small yard behind her house in Venice, with her two pit bulls, Lambchop and Boogie Woogie, and her cat, Hound Dog, amid bits of wooden deck furniture. The disorder in the yard was of a piece with the disorder in the house, whose ground floor included a long, narrow kitchen and a sprawling living room filled with dark chairs, couches, a big TV, and

audio equipment—furniture that felt not so much arranged as left there. Posters from the Broadway production of “Topdog/Underdog” and from the Public Theatre production of “In the Blood” were hung outside Parks’s study, on the second floor. Inside were the framed telegram announcing her Pulitzer and a letter from James Baldwin, evaluating her work. Written in 1983, when Parks was a student at Mount Holyoke College and took an advanced fiction-writing class with the late novelist, it reads, “Susan Parks: An utterly astounding and beautiful creature who may become one of the most valuable artists of our time.” “I got an A for that class,” Parks said proudly.

In addition to these written tributes, Parks had tacked up photographs of people she admires: Albert Einstein, William Faulkner, August Wilson. Of Wilson she said, “He never went to the theatre! And I asked him, ‘Brotha?’ And he says, ‘I didn’t grow up going to the theatre. I grew up reading books and listening to music, so going to the theatre wasn’t something that came naturally to me.’ And you can’t argue with August Wilson, because he makes such good sense. But it’s, like: Brotha! Get yo’ ass to a theatre.”

Pinned to a bulletin board behind the office door were a number of scribbled notes for future projects. In addition to working on the script for a musical based on “Ray,” the 2004 Oscar-winning movie about the late Ray Charles, Parks was composing lyrics for the songs that she performs on the college circuit, and outlining her second novel. (Her first, “Getting Mother’s Body,” was published in 2003.) Parks treats her notes as if they were missives from a dreamscape that she can revisit at will. And, like her dreams, Parks prefers to keep the genesis of her work as mysterious as possible. “Everything I write doesn’t appear to be biography until later,” she told me. “I often say that I’ve never written about anything I’ve experienced. Of course, that’s not true. But it doesn’t appear familiar to me at all. And maybe that’s because I have to be in a kind of coma in order to write. If it appeared familiar, I wouldn’t.”

In a sense, Parks’s rhythmic, repetitious, and poetic dialogue can be seen as evidence of her efforts to dig for the meaning of her own biography, which, out of a

kind of artistic necessity, eludes her. “You know my dad died a couple of years ago?” she told me. (Her father, Donald Parks, suffered from Parkinson’s disease.) “Yeah, it was sad,” she added. “He was so sick and so sad, and sad, and sad. And all of that kind of thing.” Donald was born in Chicago, but as a lieutenant colonel in the Army he rarely stayed at one base for long, and Parks grew up in several places, including Fort Knox, Kentucky, where she was born, and Germany, where she attended junior high school. A tall, athletic man, Donald was generally reticent with his children (Parks has an older sister, Stephanie, and a younger brother, Donald, Jr., who is known as Buddy), except on a series of audiotapes that he recorded for them and sent home when he was stationed in Vietnam—some of the spirit of which Parks incorporated into her first successful play, “Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom,” which won an Obie for Best New American Play in 1990. In the play, Mr. Sergeant Smith, a father of three—Buffy, Muffy, and Duffy—is waiting to be photographed. He tells the unseen photographer less about who he is than about how he would like to appear: as a “correct” Negro who believes that his hard work for home and country will be justly rewarded:

This time tomorrow mm gonna have me my Distinction. Gonna be shakin hands with thuh Commander. Gonna be salutin friendly back n forth. Gonna be rewarded uh desk cause when uh mans distinguished he’s got hisself uh desk. Standin at the desk. My desk. Sssgonna be mines, anyhow. . . . Having a desk is distinguished. All of us have them. Because when there is danger from above, we stop. We look. We listen. Then we—dive underneath our desk. . . . Here—oh. I will sit. Hands folded. Here I am—no. Arms folded. . . . Ready? Hands on books and books open. A full desk and a smiling man. Sergeant Smith has got stacks of papers, but, not to worry, he is a good worker and will do well. Wait. Uh smile. Okay. Go head. Take it. Smiling at work. They like smiles.

The only character who struggles with Sergeant Smith’s representation of



himself is his middle child, Muffy, who longs for a deeper emotional connection with her largely absent father. Shouting alternately at her mother, Mrs. Smith, and her sister, Buffy, Muffy proclaims, “He duhnd’t like me. Sergeant Smith dudhn’t like me Buffy. He only likes Mrs. Smith he only likes Buffy Smith he only likes his desk. He duduhn’t like Muffy. . . . If he really loved Muffy he’d say Muffy.” In her fierce attempts to have her name said out loud—to be acknowledged—Muffy exhibits much the same energy, the same refusal to be ignored, to be victimized, that has carried Parks forward in her career.

“Writers have a lot of power, and that might be why they’re not as respected as they should be,” Parks told me. “The first thing you do . . . you try to put them in their place. You try to convince them that they have no power. It happens to people of African descent all the time, too. Some other folks, they’re very intimidated by the power of the writer, just like some people are intimidated by the power that women have. So they have to make people feel shitty about themselves. People are intimidated by the power that black people have. So they have to make black people feel shitty about themselves. And it’s a lie. I can’t live that lie. And, if the lie is also being told in the theatre, I cannot participate in that lie. I refuse to perpetuate that lie, and I refuse to tell that lie.”

Parks’s mother, Francis McMillan Parks, is, according to the director Liz Diamond, “the kind of lady—a real Southern lady—who wears dotted swiss and gloves.” She grew up in West Texas, the first of six children of a college-educated black couple. (She currently directs a community-service program at Syracuse University.) She met her future husband at Southern University, an all-black college in Baton Rouge, in the early nineteen-fifties. Although Donald ended his career as a professor of education at the University of Vermont, he did not come from an educated family, which may explain the importance he placed on achievement. “My dad’s mom, Lucy, basically she scrubbed floors,” Parks told me. “She had a third-grade education. She would always say, ‘I didn’t have an education, but I have mother wit.’” It is her voice—as well as

Francis's West Texas locutions—that one often hears in Parks's female characters. "My grandmother Lucy wouldn't just say, 'That ink is black,'" Parks recalled. "She'd say, 'Ooooh! That sure is some black ink!'"

Although Parks insists on capturing the rhythmic intensity of her family's speech in her plays, she has not always felt close to them. She has not seen her brother, Buddy, in ten years. "He used to come to my plays when I lived in New York, first starting out," she said. "He'd hang out and drink beer. Talk to girls. Then he just . . . disappeared. He's tall. Every time a tall brother comes into the room, I think it will be my brother. Once, I got an envelope from him. It contained a ticket stub from 'Fucking A'—Parks's 2000 play—"and the receipt."

As a child, Parks loved the books her parents gave her (she still cherishes a collection of Greek myths, as well as a long dialogue between James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni), but she stopped aspiring to write after her high-school teacher in Maryland told her that she couldn't be a writer because she couldn't spell. "I grew up in a way and in a place where you just listened to your elders," she told a college audience recently. "Ma'am, and all that. So it was, like, 'O.K., Ma'am, I can't be a writer because I can't spell, because you're the elder and you told me so.'" Parks put the notion aside for years, even as the ties between language and identity pushed and prodded at her imagination. "When we were living in Germany, I didn't just feel like a black person," she told me. "I felt like a person who couldn't speak German."

At Mount Holyoke, Parks first studied chemistry, and later switched to a major in English and German literature. Suddenly, she said, there were voices in her head that wouldn't stop talking. And, once she started listening to them, she couldn't stop writing. "I remember the first short story I wrote where I could actually hear voices," she said. "It was called 'The Wedding Pig.' And it was about this family in Texas, and I could hear . . . it was the weirdest thing. I was

sitting at my desk at Mount Holyoke, and I was typing as if they were standing right over there. And I kept thinking, If I turn around, they'll leave. And I just copied down what they were saying. It's been that way ever since." She added, "Mr. Baldwin gave me the idea of being a playwright. I was writing short stories, but I would stand up when it was my turn to read and act all the voices out. He was, like, 'Uh, Miss Parks, have you ever thought about writing for the stage?'"

Parks took the suggestion. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa, in 1985, she enrolled at the Drama Studio London. "I don't know what told me the best way I could learn to be a writer was by studying acting," she said, but she was soon playing Puck in a student production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." She was also cleaning the school after class, to support herself. "I thought it was really lucky, because I didn't have to have any papers," she said. "Because I was just working for the school, basically. And, you know, school day is over and everyone goes to the pub and you stay behind and clean the toilets, vacuum."

Back in New York a year later, she roomed for a while with the performer and writer Laurie Carlos, who, in 1976, was part of the ensemble of powerful black actresses who contributed to the success of Ntozake Shange's historic play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf." Parks had met Carlos when she was still an undergrad and had a summer job at the Sojourner Truth Players, in Fort Worth. "We did a production of 'For Colored Girls,' which Laurie directed," Parks recalled. "And I told her I wanted to come to New York after I graduated. And she said, 'Well, *mi casa, su casa*—come on.' She was the only one I knew in the whole city."

In New York, Parks supported herself as a temp ("I am a proud graduate of the Betty Owen secretarial school," she said) while working on her plays. The first to be produced was "Betting on the Dust Commander" (1987), which Carlos directed. Parks found a space and paid the actors and the director herself. "I was hanging out at the Gas Station"—

a bar then on Manhattan's Lower East Side—she said. "And you'd sit there and drink and look at the cement walls, and I was, like, to the guy who ran it, 'Hey, man! Can I do a play here?' And he was, like, 'Oh, sure!' They didn't have any chairs. They hadn't done a play in their life. I had never done a play in my life. We ran for three nights. My dad, my mom, and my sister, and one of the homeless guys from the neighborhood—that's basically all the people who came. The lighting cues were 'Lights up,' 'Lights down.' There was an extension cord, which I still have to this day. 'Lights up' was plugging the extension cord in, and 'Lights down' was unplugging the extension cord. And it was my job to do it."

On the advice of Alisa Solomon during that fateful subway ride, Parks sent her next play, "Imperceptible Mutabilities," to Mac Wellman, who was the literary adviser of the Brooklyn Arts and Cultural Association Downtown at the time. "He sort of flipped, and sent it to me," Liz Diamond said. "And I sort of flipped. And I met Suzan-Lori near Lincoln Center, and we talked and talked. I wanted it to be a trinity, not a play in four acts. She convinced me that the structure was right by writing and rewriting when something wasn't clear." Composed like a mosaic, "Imperceptible Mutabilities" is a series of dense scenes about black life from slavery to the present, linked by the metaphor of the natural sciences. In one monologue, a young woman talks about her childhood fascination with the TV show "Wild Kingdom." As an adult, she works as a euthanasiast in an animal clinic. In another scene, three black women are studied, as if through a microscope, by a male scientist. These various closed-off worlds are like urgent messages that Parks has stuffed into bottles and cast into the sea of white America's incomprehension—of women, of blacks, and of those who are both. "Imperceptible Mutabilities" premiered at the BACA Downtown Theatre, in 1989, when Parks was only twenty-six. Although the play was, at times, alienating, the *Times* theatre critic Mel Gussow named Parks the year's most promising playwright, noting, "Ms. Parks's heightened, dreamlike approach is occasionally reminiscent of the work of Adrienne



Kennedy and Ntozake Shange. . . . But there is substantial evidence of the playwright's originality; ironically this occurs in a play that deals partly with the loss of identity. Ms. Parks's identity as an artist is clear."

Parks and the generation of African-American artists who came of age with her—among them the visual artists Glenn Ligon and Lorna Simpson—were born after *Brown v. Board of Education*. They made use of every bit of information to which they, unlike their parents, had access. Their work was indivisible from who they were—black, intellectual, sexual, "down" and sophisticated. These artists examined their European and African roots simultaneously, each contributing to a broader understanding of what it means to be an American. (The critic Greg Tate used the phrase "Cult-Nats meet Freaky Deke" to describe this trend.)

Parks, with her love of all language—from High German literature to black American speech—is a testament to this eclecticism. Of her next full-length work, "The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World" (1990), an allegorical play about race and masculinity, which was also staged at BACA, she says, "Some of it's not even English. It's, you know, *blah-blah-blah doin' diddly-dip-da-drop*. It's just sound. It's the sound of the dead, and the dead don't make living sounds. But I had some great actors, and they would try anything." Still, Parks has never been, solely, an experimentalist. She has an interest in the larger world, and in its larger audiences. "Black Man" was, in some ways, a transitional work for her. A more coherent piece than "Imperceptible," it was also more willfully provocative, Parks's attempt to stake a claim for herself within the discourse of race and gender studies. The play is a tribute to the many social and cultural visions of the black male, posing the question: If the last black man in the world were to die tomorrow, what would remain of him? (The play's list of characters includes Black Man with Watermelon, Black Woman with Fried Drumstick, Lots of Grease and Lots of Pork, and Old Man River Jordan.)

In 1991, Parks became an associate artist at the Yale School of Drama. It

was during that time that she began to conceive her next play, "Venus," which was based, in part, on the life and legend of Saartjie Baartman, an African woman who, early in the nineteenth century, scandalized British and European spectators by flashing her pronounced derriere in various sideshows. "Venus" was the apotheosis of the themes that Parks explored in what she now calls her "B.P."—or Before Pulitzer—work: the black female body as an object of fantasy, or of derision; the improvised family; history as a carny tent filled with barkers, illusionists, and confidence men; speech as an entirely subjective act; the essential loneliness of being. ("Oh God: Unloved," Parks has Baartman cry at a pivotal moment in the play.) The playwright Tony Kushner wrote that "Venus" pushes "racial clichés and stereotypes out of the unlit mutters' corners and back to center stage, where the sight of them makes us wince." Parks did not shy away from showing Baartman's uglier sides, too; she deftly illustrated how Baartman was corrupted by her own fame, how the powerless end up identifying with their oppressors. Speaking of the Baron Docteur, the married lover who enslaved her, Venus says:

He is not thuh most thrilling lay Ive had but his gold makes up thuh difference and hhhh I love him.

He will leave that wife for good and we'll get married (we better or I'll make a scene) oh, we'll get married.

And we will lie in bed and make love all day long.

Hahahaha.

We'll set tongues wagging for the rest of the century.

The Docteur will introduce me to Napoléon himself: Oh, yes yr Royal Highness the Negro question does keep me awake at night oh yes it does. . . .

Every afternoon I'll take a 3 hour bath. In hot rosewater. . . .

They'll rub my body with the most expensive oils perfume my big buttocks and sprinkle them with gold dust!

Come here quick, slave and attend me!

Fetch my sweets! Fix my hair!

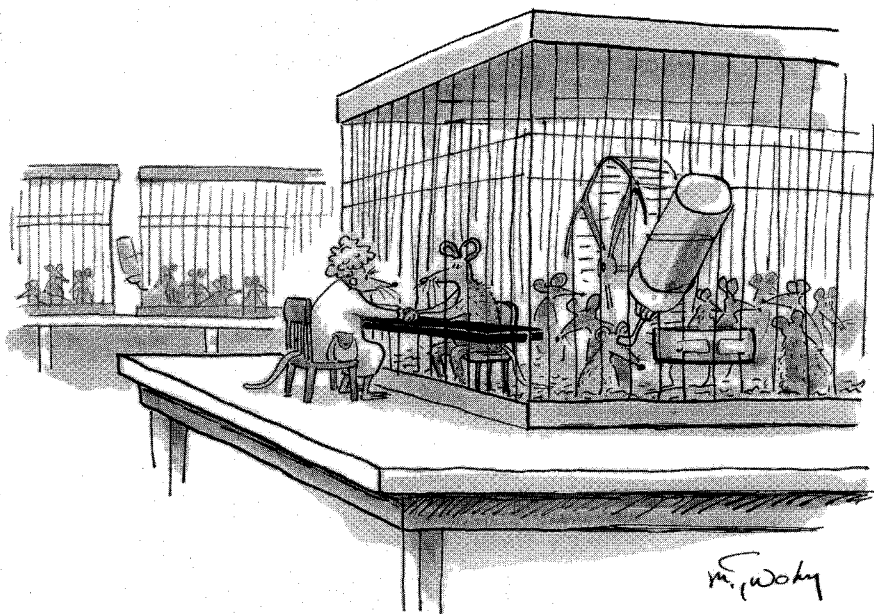
Do this do that do this do that!

The playwright George C. Wolfe had seen "Black Man" in Brooklyn, in 1990, and found himself intrigued. Already a successful playwright himself, thanks to his iconoclastic 1986 work "The Colored Museum"—which sent up Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" and Shange's "For Colored Girls" in one scene alone—he saw in Parks's writing, he told me, "unquestionably a non-clichéd, not-easy-to-digest vision of American history, black culture, the family, that was very complicated and smart and demanding. And a kind of voice that needed to be fed productions so that it could get better and smarter and grow."

Parks told me that "1990 was like a brave-new-world kind of thing," adding, "Everybody and their mama was telling me what they were going to do for me. And talk is cheap. I will love George C. Wolfe until the day I die. He was one of the only ones out of all those people who actually did something, who actually came through." Wolfe became the artistic director of the Public Theatre in



"Yes, I'm still working on it."



1993, and Parks's "The America Play" was one of the first shows that he produced there (with Diamond directing). In 1996, Wolfe agreed to take on "Venus" as well, and he asked Parks to consider working with the avant-garde director Richard Foreman. "George called me and said he wanted Suzan-Lori to work with someone who was smarter," Foreman recalled, laughing. "I wasn't sure about that, but I was certainly experienced." By pairing Parks with Foreman at the Public, Wolfe was positioning her not only as a force in the experimental theatre but as an artist, it was hoped, who could draw a relatively large, racially mixed crowd.

Ever since the mid-sixties—when Amiri Baraka, a.k.a. LeRoi Jones, had turned his back on the white downtown theatre community where he had made his name, in order to found the heavily politicized anti-white Black Arts Repertory Theatre, in Harlem, and then Spirit House in Newark, New Jersey—much of black theatre had seemed inaccessible to white audiences. But Parks was different. If she had any ideology at all, it was, as she wrote in her 1995 essay "An Equation for Black People Onstage," not to allow the white oppression of blacks to constitute the central drama in her work. "The Klan does not always have to be outside the door for Black people to have lives worthy of dramatic literature," she wrote. "Saying that 'Whitey' has to be present in Black drama because Whitey

is an inextricable aspect of Black reality is like saying that every play has to have a murder in it, is like saying that every drama involving Jews must reference Treblinka."

Parks was, in a sense, building a bigger house beyond the small rooms that another black female playwright, Adrienne Kennedy, had peopled with her characters. Kennedy had been working at the opposite extreme from the Baraka aesthetic since the early sixties. Not only were white characters not an issue in her unconventional plays; neither was the "real world." Her characters lived in and for their own thoughts about history, myth, sexuality, and death. Yet, after Kennedy's powerful benefactor, Joseph Papp, the Public Theatre's founder, died, in 1991, interest in her work declined somewhat, and the city's most important nonprofit theatre was left open to producers like Wolfe, who wanted to nurture younger experimentalists. Before long, Parks became, arguably, the theatre world's great black hope.

Still, despite Wolfe's best efforts, Foreman's empathetic stage direction, and Adina Porter's sensitive characterization in the title role, "Venus" received mixed reviews. Writing in the *Times*, Ben Brantley said, "Heaven knows that Ms. Parks . . . and Mr. Foreman . . . both have talent and originality to spare. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they should be married." He concluded that "Venus" was

"a protracted exercise in the obvious. It makes its points about racial and sexual exploitation firmly and early and then treads water in contorted postures for two hours." Parks tended to share the critics' views. Foreman, she said, was used to working on his own plays or on those of dead playwrights. "All I wanted for 'Venus' was, you know, a temperature, a pulse. It just seemed cold to me," she said. Foreman, too, felt that the final result was "a little stiff" and "not my very best work," a problem that he attributes partly to suggestions he received from the Public. Nevertheless, "Venus" carried Parks one crucial step closer to the theatrical mainstream. "Maybe one of the reasons 'Venus' is so haunting—and so important—is that it reflects what Suzan-Lori was becoming during the time she wrote it: a very powerful black female artist," Diamond said.

In 1999, Wolfe took Parks to the Broadway premiere of Patrick Marber's play "Closer." "I'll never forget it," he told me, in his bright office in lower Manhattan, a few months ago. "At the end of the play, all the actors were taking their curtain calls and all the photographers rushed downstage to take pictures. And I saw this look on her face that read, in essence, 'This will never happen to me.' And that had a huge impact on me, because I thought, It should. Nobody should be locked out of the possibility. If you have the talent and passion and commitment, you shouldn't be locked out of the room."

Wolfe called several backers—including the San Francisco-based producer Carole Shorenstein Hays—and said, "Look, there has not been a play on Broadway by a black woman since 'Colored Girls.'" By then, Parks had written "Topdog/Underdog." Composed over four days, the play sprang from an idea that she'd had while she and her soon-to-be husband, Paul Oscher, a blues musician, were watching a game of three-card monte. As Oscher explained the tricks of the game to her, Parks began to think of a way to use them onstage. As she wrote, she was reminded of two characters she'd created for the opening scene of "The America Play." One of them, a black man, made a living by donning white-face to impersonate Abraham Lincoln

in an arcade that allowed would-be John Wilkes Booths to “assassinate” him. For “Topdog,” she returned to the idea of a Lincoln impersonator, but instead of focussing on national tragedy she drew her characters closer, placed them in a room, and made it tremble with family grievances. In the resulting two-character, two-act work, Lincoln’s brother, Booth, resentful of Lincoln’s success, ends up shooting him for real. The play premièred at the Public in 2001, with Wolfe directing, and Jeffrey Wright and Don Cheadle in the starring roles. (Rehearsals were unorthodox from the start: Wolfe took some time to decide who should play Lincoln and who should play Booth; he had Wright and Cheadle read each part on different days. Wright ended up playing Lincoln to superb effect.) In 2002, Wolfe found a home for “Topdog” on Broadway. “When my agent called to tell me that we had the Ambassador, I didn’t know what he was talking about,” Parks says now. “I said, ‘The ambassador of what?’”

When the play opened on Broadway—with the actor and rapper Mos Def replacing Cheadle—Ben Brantley wrote, “Like ‘Invisible Man,’ . . . ‘Topdog/Underdog’ considers nothing less than the existential traps of being African-American and male in the United States, the masks that wear the men as well as vice versa.” By positioning Parks as a successor to Ralph Ellison, however, Brantley was missing a substantial point: the play owes much more to Parks’s mentor, James Baldwin, and to his novelistic examination of how race affects and sometimes destroys the relationship between brothers. In a sense, “Topdog” is also an open letter to Parks’s own absent brother, Buddy, and a farewell to the more hermetic approach she’d taken in “The Death of the Last Black Man,” twelve years earlier. Now she was playing less with the complication of language and idea than with the eruption of emotion in the characters themselves; some of the elements that had been so startling in her earlier work were more conventional and audience-friendly. Wolfe and Parks have since, more or less, parted ways artistically, and Parks is working on a screenplay for a film version of “Topdog” without him. (“She’s a complicated girl,” Wolfe says when asked about his

former protégée.) Before the Broadway opening of “Topdog,” Parks also completed her first novel—a novel in voices,” she calls it—which told the story of a black family living in Texas in the nineteen-sixties, and which owed a clear debt to Faulkner’s “As I Lay Dying.” “I thought I was crazy,” she said recently. “But something told me to finish the book while we were in rehearsals for the play. So I would rush home after rehearsal and write the book until I had a draft. I’m glad I did, because the world then went *woosh!*”

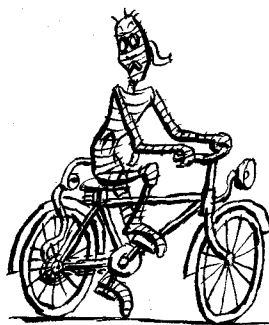
Parks won a MacArthur “genius” grant shortly after “Topdog” closed at the Public. The Pulitzer came the following year, and Parks took some time away from New York, teaching at Cal Arts and working on screenplays. (She has written scripts for Spike Lee and Oprah Winfrey.) Still, she has never felt quite at home in California, or in its most popular industry. “It’s a great place to grow old,” she said of Los Angeles, which she may leave soon. “The weather’s nice, and it doesn’t snow, so you don’t have to worry about slipping. But I think what actually happens is that people grow older faster here, even though they spend so much money trying to look young, because they have to give up things that they really believe in.” She paused and considered. “I have this theory that the soul is like a lizard’s tail. If you pull it off, another one will grow back in its place. But repeated abuses will give you a lot of scar tissue. So there’s a lot of scar tissue around the soul. While it will always grow back, it doesn’t function as well.”

By last August, seven months after Metzgar and Parks had begun to dream up their ambitious production plan for “365 Days/365 Plays,” the Public had signed on to be a “hub theatre” in New York, as had Atlanta’s Al-

liance Theatre, Chicago’s Goodman and Steppenwolf Theatres, and Los Angeles’s Center Theatre Group, all of which would coördinate and oversee the project with smaller stages in their areas. Parks and Metzgar had attended theatre festivals and run a series of “town-hall meetings” in various cities, in order to promote and draw attention to “365”; these had attracted many theatre artists who supported the over-all goal of “365”: using the plays to connect theatres and audiences across the country.

One afternoon, a number of performers, including the Emmy-winning actress S. Epatha Merkerson, Daphne Rubin-Vega, and Reg E. Cathay, sat at a long reading table in one of the Public’s darkened auditoriums. Parks wanted to hear the plays performed so that she could fine-tune the script for publication. Some of the plays are short dialogues or monologues, faithful renditions of the West Texas locutions that Parks loves. Others involve huge crowd scenes that would flood the stage. The final play consists entirely of stage directions. After reading through a piece about infanticide called “The News Is Here,” Cathay said, “Wow! That was from your dark period.” Rubin-Vega, who had appeared in Parks’s “Fucking A,” was delighted to discover that she was a character in another scene. “I’m in the Suzan-Lori canon!” she said. Looking at the date for one play, the actors realized that it had been written on the anniversary of September 11th, and paused for a moment. They seemed to treat the script as a diary of sorts, one through which they could recall not only national events but personal ones as well.

As they delighted in the big swoops of logic and talk that their roles required of them, Parks listened with the intensity of a court stenographer. What she was experiencing, she articulated a month later, at Northeastern Illinois University: “When you wake up, and look at your lover or husband, or whatever, that’s a way of honoring your commitment. But then you get out of bed and say another kind of prayer when you sit down at your desk. I wake up every day and say, ‘Yes! I’m a writer!’ When you make that commitment, all sorts of things move toward you.” ♦



FICTION

REPÚBLICA AND GRAU

BY DANIEL ALARCÓN



The blind man lived in a single room above a bodega, on a street not so far from Maico's house. It was up a slight hill, as was everything in the neighborhood. There was nothing on the walls of the blind man's room, nor was there anywhere to sit, and so Maico stood. He was ten years old. There was a single bed, a nightstand with a radio wrapped in duct tape, a washbasin. The blind man had graying hair and was much older than Maico's father. The boy looked at his feet, and kicked together a small mound of dust on the cement floor while his father and the blind man spoke. The boy didn't listen, but then no one expected him to. He was not surprised when a tiny black spider emerged from the insignificant pile he had made. It skittered across the floor and disappeared beneath the bed. Maico raised his eyes. A cobweb glittered in an upper corner. It was the room's only decoration.

His father reached out and shook the blind man's hand. "So it's agreed," Maico's father said, and the blind man nodded, and this was all.

A week later, Maico and the blind man were in the city, at the noisy intersection of República and Grau. They had risen early on a winter morning of low, leaden skies, and made their way to the center, to this place of snarling, bleating traffic, in the shadow of a great hotel. The blind man carried a red-tipped cane, and he knew the route well, but once they arrived he folded the cane and left it in the grassy median. His steps became tentative, and Maico understood that the pretending had begun. The blind man's smile disappeared, and his jaw went slack.

Everything there was to know Maico learned in that first hour. The lights were timed: there were three minutes of work, followed by three minutes of waiting. When the traffic stopped, the blind man put one hand on the boy's shoulder and with the other held out his tin, and together they walked up the row of idling cars. Maico led him toward the cars with windows rolled down, and the blind man muttered helplessly as he approached each one. Maico's only job was to steer him toward those who were likely to give, and make sure that he did not waste time on those who would not. Women driving alone were, according to the blind man, preemptively generous, hop-

ing, in this way, to avoid being robbed. They kept small coins in their ashtrays for just such transactions. Taxi-drivers could be counted on as well, because they were working people, and men with women always wanted to impress and might let slip a few coins to show their sensitive side. Men driving alone rarely gave, and not a moment should be squandered beside a car with tinted windows. "If they know you can't see them," the blind man said, "they don't feel shame."

"But they know you can't see them," Maico said.

"And that's why you're here."

Maico's mother hadn't wanted him to work in the city, had said so the night before, but his father had bellowed and slammed a fist on the table. Of course, these gestures were hardly necessary; in truth, Maico didn't mind the work. He even liked the pace, especially those moments when there was nothing to do but watch the endless traffic, soak in its dull roar. "Grau is the road people take to connect to the northern districts," the blind man explained. He had the city mapped clearly in his mind. There was money to be made in the north: it was a region of people trying to better themselves. Not like the southern rich, who had forgotten where they'd come from. "It's a generous intersection, this one," the blind man said. "These people recognize me and love me because they have known me their entire lives. They give."

Maico listened as well as he could above the din. *Me me me*—that was what he heard. The cars and the engines and the blind man; it was all one sound. Acrid fumes hung over the intersection, so toxic that after only an hour Maico could feel a bubble in his chest, and then, in his throat, something tickling.

He coughed and spat. He apologized, as his mother had taught him.

The blind man laughed. "You'll do much worse here, boy. You'll cough and piss and shit and it will all be the same."

The clouds thinned out by noon, but that morning was cool and damp. The blind man kept all the money, periodically announcing how much they'd collected. It wasn't much. Each time a coin was dropped into the tin, the blind man bowed humbly, and though he hadn't been asked to, Maico did the same. The blind man emptied the tin into his pocket when the light changed, and warned

Maico to watch out for thieves, but the boy saw only men hawking newspapers and chalkboards, women with baskets of bread or flowers or fruit, and the very density of people in the area made it seem safe. Everyone had been kind to him so far. A woman his mother's age gave him a piece of bread with sweet potato because it was his first day. She tended to a few toddlers on the median. They were playing with a stuffed animal, taking turns tearing it to pieces. The stuffing spread across the grass in white clumps, and, when a truck rolled by, these were blown into the street.

When the blind man found out that Maico had gone to school, he bought a newspaper and had the boy read it to him. He nodded or clucked his tongue while Maico read, and the stories were so absorbing that they even missed a few lights so that he could finish them. A judge had been murdered the previous day, in broad daylight, at a restaurant not far from where they sat. An editorial defended the life of a guard dog the authorities wanted put down for having killed a thief. There would be a new President soon, and protests were planned to welcome her. Music leaked from the windows of passing cars, and Maico could hear voices at each light singing along to a dozen different melodies. When he could, he studied the blind man's face. Unshaven and olive-skinned, with puffy cheeks. His nose was crooked and squat. He didn't wear dark glasses as some of the blind did, and Maico guessed that the sullen sheen of the man's useless gray eyes was part of his value as a beggar. It was a competitive area, after all, and there were others working that morning whose qualifications for the position were clearly beyond question.

Maico's father was waiting at the door of the blind man's room when they got back that afternoon. He winked at Maico, and then greeted the blind man gruffly, surprising him. "The money," he said, with no warmth in his voice. "Let's see it."

The blind man pulled out his key and patted the door for the lock. "Not here. Inside is better. You people with eyes are always so impatient."

Maico stood by while they divided the take. The counting went slowly. The blind man felt each coin carefully, then announced its worth out loud. When no

on the town

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one contradicted him, he continued, his hands moving with elegant assurance, organizing the money into piles on the bed. A few times, he misidentified a coin, but Maico felt certain that this was by design. The third time it happened, Maico's father sighed. "I'll count," he said, but the blind man would have none of it.

"That wouldn't be fair, now, would it?"

When the counting was done, Maico and his father walked home in silence. It had taken longer than they'd expected, and Maico's father was in a hurry. When his mother asked how it had gone, his father sneered and said that there was no money. Or none worth mentioning. He prepared for his night shift while the boy and his mother ate dinner.

The second day, it was the same, but on the third, when they walked down the hill, Maico's father took the boy to the market and bought sodas for them both. An old gentleman with thick, calloused hands served them. Maico drank his soda through a straw. His father asked him how the work was, whether he liked it. By now, Maico was old enough to know that he should not say too much. He'd learned this from his mother.

Did he like downtown?

He did.

And was he enjoying the work?

He was.

What was it like?

Here, Maico chose his words carefully, explaining what he had absorbed in those few days. About charity, about traffic, about the relative generosity of cars headed north versus those headed south.

Maico's father listened calmly. He finished his soda, ordered a beer, then thought better of it. He looked at his watch, then scattered a few coins on the counter, and the old man swept them into his palm with a frown. "We're being robbed," Maico's father said. "Do you hear me, boy? You've got to keep track of the money. You've got to add it up in your head."

Maico was quiet.

"Are you listening to me? The blind man gets half. We get half."

The blind man had bought Maico a bag of popcorn that morning. After Maico had read him the paper, he had told stories about how the city had been when the air there was still sweet, when there was no traffic. The place he described seemed fantastical. "Even the intersection where we work was quiet once," the blind man

had said, smiling, because he knew this would be hard to believe.

Now the boy looked up at his father.

"You can't let a blind man hustle you, son," his father said. "It's an embarrassment."

Maico did his best to keep an accurate count the next day, but by lunchtime the exhaust made him swoon. When he asked how much there was, the blind man said that he couldn't know for sure. "I'll count it later," he said.

"Count it now," Maico said. The words came out with a certain snap that the boy liked.

But the blind man just smiled. "Cute," he said. "Now read the next story."

A horn blew, and then another, and soon there was a chorus. When the street was quiet enough, Maico opened the paper again. An entire village in the mountains had been poisoned during a festival. Bad meat. The Minister of Health was airlifting in medicine and doctors. Then the light changed, and it was time to work.

Every afternoon, Maico's father was there to meet them at the door of the blind man's room. The money was never enough, and his father could not, or would not, hide his displeasure. Maico could sense it, knew with such certainty that it was coming, that when on the eighth day his father knocked the radio off the nightstand and said, "You stealing blind fuck!" he felt that he had willed it to happen. His father, angry, was a sight to behold: that great red face, eyes open to the whites, fists like mallets. Maico wondered if the blind man could truly appreciate the spectacle. Was his father's voice, the sharp edge of it, enough?

If nothing else, the blind man understood the seriousness of the moment. He seemed neither surprised nor afraid when his pockets were emptied.

The radio sputtered and died.

Until it stopped, Maico hadn't even noticed that it was on.

They were back at work a few days later, with a new agreement. The boy would hold the money now. The coins weighed heavily in his pocket, so that the money felt like a lot more than it was. Just small, old, thin coins, worthless, worn-down coins, and when the work was done that day the blind man asked the boy to point him toward the hotel. It was sunny, and in the slanting afternoon light the

hotel's glowing glass exterior seemed to be made of gold. "Now let's walk to it," the blind man said. He knew the way, and he had collected his cane, but here, in front of their regular clientele, it was understood that the boy should continue to lead him. They crossed Grau together, the blind man's hand on Maico's shoulder.

"On the far side of the hotel is a street. Read me the sign," the blind man said.

It was a narrow street. "Palomares," Maico said.

"Let's walk down this one, boy. Away from Grau."

When they had crossed the second intersection, the blind man asked what was on each corner. Maico went clockwise: a bakery, a man selling roasted corn from a cart, an Internet café, a butcher shop.

The blind man smiled. "Behind the cart, what is there?"

"A bar."

"This bar—what's it called?"

"El Moises."

"Let's go in."

It was quiet in the bar, and the blind man asked Maico to choose the best table. The boy picked one by a window. El Moises was just below street level, and the windows allowed a view of people's legs as they passed. The smell of roasted corn on the cob filled the bar, and they hadn't been there long before the blind man gave in and asked for two. He'd already finished his first beer by then. He gave one ear of corn to Maico and washed the other down with a second cold glass of beer. He spoke wistfully of the fights that had exploded before him in this very same space: of chairs thrown, of bottles broken and brandished as weapons, of the beautiful noise of conflict. You could hear it in the breathing of those around you—panic, fear, adrenaline. There were a dozen names for that extraordinary sensation.

"What do you do when it happens?" Maico asked.



"Well, you fight, of course."

"But what do *you* do?"

"Ah, that's what you mean. How does a blind man fight? I'll tell you." He spoke nearly in a whisper. "Recklessly. With whatever implement is at hand. Swinging wildly and searching desperately for an exit." The blind man sighed. "I suppose it's not so different for those who can see. More desperate, perhaps, or more reckless."

The waiter had turned on a radio, a low humming melody that Maico could not quite make out. They were the only people in the bar.

"Tell me," the blind man said after a while, "what do you look like? I should have asked sooner. Describe yourself."

No one had ever asked Maico such a thing. In fact, it wouldn't have occurred to him that a question like that could even be asked. Describe himself. He thought for a moment, but nothing came to mind. "I'm a boy," he managed. "I'm ten years old."

"More than that," the blind man said. He took a swig from his beer. "I need more than that."

Maico squirmed in his chair.

"What does your face look like? I know you're small for your age. How are you dressed?"

"Normal" was all the boy could say.

"I'm dressed normal. I look normal."

"Your clothes, for example, your shirt—what material is it?"

"I don't know."

"Can I touch it?" the blind man said. Without waiting for an answer, he had already reached out and was testing the fabric of Maico's shirt between his thumb and forefinger. "Is the color very faded?"

"No," Maico said.

"Does your shirt have a collar?"

"Yes."

"Are there holes in the knees of your pants?"

"They're patched."

"And are the pants hemmed?"

"Yes."

The blind man grunted. "Your shirt is tucked in?"

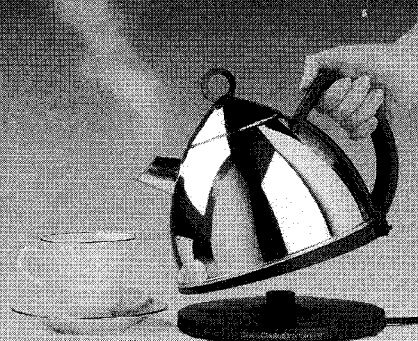
Maico looked down. It was.

"And you're wearing a belt, I assume. It's leather?"

"Yes."

The blind man sighed. He called for another beer, and when the glass was placed on the table he asked the waiter to stay for a moment. "Sir, excuse me," he

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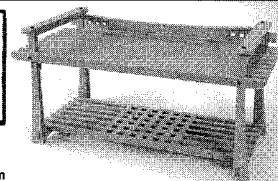
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said, raising his right hand. He told Maico to stand, and then addressed the waiter again. "How would you describe the general appearance of this child?"

The waiter was a serious, unsmiling man. He looked Maico over, from head to toe. "He's dressed neatly. He looks clean."

"His hair—is it combed?"

"Quite."

The blind man thanked him and told Maico to sit down. He drank his beer, and for a moment Maico thought that he wouldn't speak again. On the radio, a new song started up, a voice accompanied by a bright, ringing guitar, and the blind man smiled and tapped his fingers against the table. He sang along, tra-la-la-ed for a moment when he didn't know the words, and then fell silent altogether.

"Your old man thinks he's a tough guy," he said finally, after the song had finished and the waiter had brought him another beer. "Here's the problem. He goes off to work every night, and he doesn't see you in the morning, and, meanwhile, your mother dresses you. She must be a nice woman. Very correct. But you're a mama's boy. Pardon me, son, but I must speak plainly. That's why we don't make money. You can't beg looking like this."

Maico was silent.

The blind man laughed. "Are you taking this hard?"

"No," Maico said.

"Good. Very well." The blind man nodded, and whistled for the waiter, who appeared at the table and announced what was owed.

"Thank you, sir," the blind man said, smiling in every direction. "A receipt, please. The boy will be paying."

That night, Maico's father went into a rage. "Where's the money? Where's the money, you lazy little shit?" And what could he say except this: "I spent it," the sentence escaping on its own, and his fear arriving as soon as those three words and the half-truth they expressed were audible. Fear spread outward from his chest, so that his arms felt light and useless, his stomach watery, and then his legs would not hold him up any longer. His mother, when she tried to intervene, was beaten as well, and there was a moment in that short, furious episode—an instant—when Maico felt certain that he would not survive. His mother's screams told him that this was not like the other times, although

if he had dared to open his eyes he would have known it for himself, from the savage look on his father's face. Then there was noise and there was light, and Maico peeked and the room itself seemed to move. He was pushed and he stood, and he was shoved and he surprised himself by standing again, and this continued until he no longer could.

All was quiet. Maico didn't know how much time had passed, only that his father had gone. He opened his eyes. The glass door of the cabinet had been shattered, a chair leg snapped. There had been a storm, and now it had passed; inexplicably, there was no blood. His mother leaned against the far wall, not sobbing,

just breathing, and Maico crawled toward her, and then he slept.

Maico didn't dream that night. The few hours of sleep he managed were blank and dark. He woke at dawn in his bed. His mother must have moved him.

The blind man arrived the next morning, as if nothing had happened. Maico saw him and realized that he'd expected the man to be dead; he'd imagined that the fury his father had unleashed on him would be doubled or tripled for the blind man. Instead, the blind man wore the same contented look he'd had the afternoon before, when he left the boy at the bus stop, saying that he would make his own way home. There had been a softness

DURING THE WAR

When my brother came home from war
he carried his left arm in a black sling
but assured us most of it was still there.
Spring was late, the trees forgot to leaf out.

I stood in a long line waiting for bread.
The woman behind me said it was shameless,
someone as strong as I still home, still intact
while her Michael was burning to death.

Yes, she could feel the fire, could smell
his pain all the way from Tarawa—
or was it Midway?—and he so young,
younger than I, who was only fourteen,

taller, more handsome in his white uniform
turning slowly gray the way unprimed wood
grays slowly in the grate when the flames
sputter and die. "I think I'm going mad,"

she said when I turned to face her. She placed
both hands on my shoulders, kissed each eyelid,
hugged me to her breasts and whispered wetly
in my bad ear words I'd never heard before.

When I got home my brother ate the bread
carefully one slice at a time until nothing
was left but a blank plate. "Did you see her,"
he asked, "the woman in hell, Michael's wife?"

That afternoon I walked the crowded streets
looking for something I couldn't name,
something familiar, a face or a voice or less,
but not these shards of ash that fell from heaven.

—Philip Levine

to his words; he wasn't drunk, Maico knew, but happy, as happy as Maico was humiliated, as happy as Maico was angry.

"Go," his mother said. "Go. We need the money," and so Maico swallowed, and stretched his sore, wounded body. He stared angrily at the blind man, and then, with his mother sighing softly, he went.

Maico knew the way by then. Knew it well. Knew the names of the streets they passed on their descent to the center, the turns they took, the intersections where the road was rutted and the bus shook. All the sights along the way, the determined faces of the men and women who got off and on, and the collective breath the bus took as they crossed the bridge just before the old center. In the rainy season, the thin, dirty stream beneath them would come to life—or a kind of life—but for now it was just an anemic trickle that would not make it to the sea. Boys his age ran along the riverbed; Maico could see them from the bus, tending to their oily fires. If he'd been asked, he could have described it all for the blind man, this city of dirt and smoke, but Maico supposed that the blind man knew this place better than he ever would.

He didn't read the paper that day, didn't listen to the blind man's stories as the avenue filled and emptied according to its own sombre rhythms. He waited for the blind man to apologize, though he knew that he wouldn't. He didn't bother to count the money before it disappeared into his pocket, and it was only when the skies began to clear, when the sun poured through a gaping hole in the clouds, that he realized that there had never been so much. Maico touched his face. His sore jaw, his bruised cheek, his right eye, not swollen shut but pinched so that he had to strain to keep it open. The blind man couldn't know. *Describe yourself. What do you look like?*

Beggar.

He was surrounded by them, could see them now, this itinerant army of supplicants, waiting for a stroke of good luck, for some generous act to redeem the day or the week or the month. Counting, hour after hour, the careful arithmetic of survival: this much for food, this much if I walk home, this much for the children, for the house, for the soup, for the drink, for the roof over my head, this much to keep the cold at bay. Maico's father spent his waking hours in another part of the city, engaged in much the same calculus,

and if he had succeeded at anything it was in shielding the boy from this.

"We're doing well today, no?" the blind man said. He didn't wait for an answer, just smiled dumbly and hummed a tune.

Then the light changed, and the boy gathered himself and led the blind man again through the idling rows of traffic. The air was sweet with exhaust. A man driving alone dropped money into the tin. Maico stopped short. He turned to the blind man, faced him.

"What are you doing?" the blind man asked.

It wasn't a question that Maico could have answered, even if he'd tried. There was no question of trying. Maico reached into his pocket, pulled out the money they'd earned that morning, the money they'd been given, and dropped a handful into the blind man's tin, where it rattled wonderfully, heavily, falling with such abrupt weight that the blind man nearly let go. He said, "What's wrong with you, boy?" But Maico was not listening, could hear nothing but the sound of the revving motors, and he watched in the glare for the light to change; another handful of coins, little ten-cent pieces, the bigger silver coins that really meant something—all of it Maico dropped into the tin. He read the confusion on the blind man's face. The money was all gone now; he had none of it, and he began to step back and away from the blind man.

"Where are you going? Where are you?" the blind man said, not pleading but not unconcerned.

Maico steeled himself, and with a swift slap he upended the blind man's tin, knocking it and the coins from the beggar's hands and into the street. Some rolled under the idling cars, others nestled into the cracks in the pavement, and a few caught a glint of sun and shone and shone. But only for the boy.

A moment later, the light had changed, and the traffic had resumed its northward progress. But even if it had not, even if every car in the city had waited patiently for the blind man to drop to his knees and pick up each of the coins, Maico would have seen something that made it all worthwhile. It was what the boy would remember, what he would replay in his mind as he walked away, across the bridge, and up the long hill toward home. The blind man, suddenly helpless—for a moment, he was not pretending. ♦

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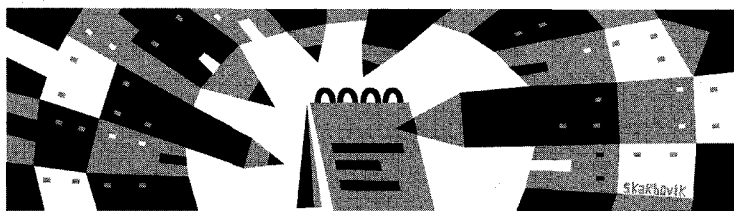
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THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

BODY LANGUAGE

Janet Jackson at forty.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

The title of Janet Jackson's new album, "20 Y.O.," is both an invitation to take note of her perpetually youthful looks (aided by the ritual magazine photographs of her near-naked, now forty-year-old body) and a directive for how to think about her career. Jackson, like her eight siblings, began performing as a child—much longer than twenty years ago. In the nineteen-seventies, she played the innocent, physically abused preteen Penny Gordon on the TV series "Good Times," and in the early eighties she recorded two not particularly good or popular albums. Then, in 1986, she released "Control," the record that she evidently considers to be the true starting point of her career. Produced by the Minneapolis musicians Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, who at the time were best known for having played with Prince, "Control" made everybody involved famous. Songs like "Nasty" and "What Have You Done for Me Lately?" presented a brash, sexually confident young woman singing over big, blocky dance beats that split the difference between pop and R.&B. (Pop-culture fans will remember 1986 as the year that the phrase "Miss Jackson, if you're nasty" entered the lexicon.)

"Control" and Jackson's subsequent album, "Rhythm Nation," established her as a star, independent of her world-consuming brother Michael. This is psychologically freighted stuff: Jackson's albums sounded little like her brother's work and a lot like that of

Prince, Michael's only serious rival; Jam and Lewis were proving that they could create a version of Minneapolis funk that was as brawny as Prince's without his help. Their records helped establish what became the dominant sound in dance music for several years: brisk, minimal drum patterns; bursts of keyboard and guitar; and lyrics delivered with some of hip-hop's attitude but conveying a more old-fashioned sense of wit and double entendre.

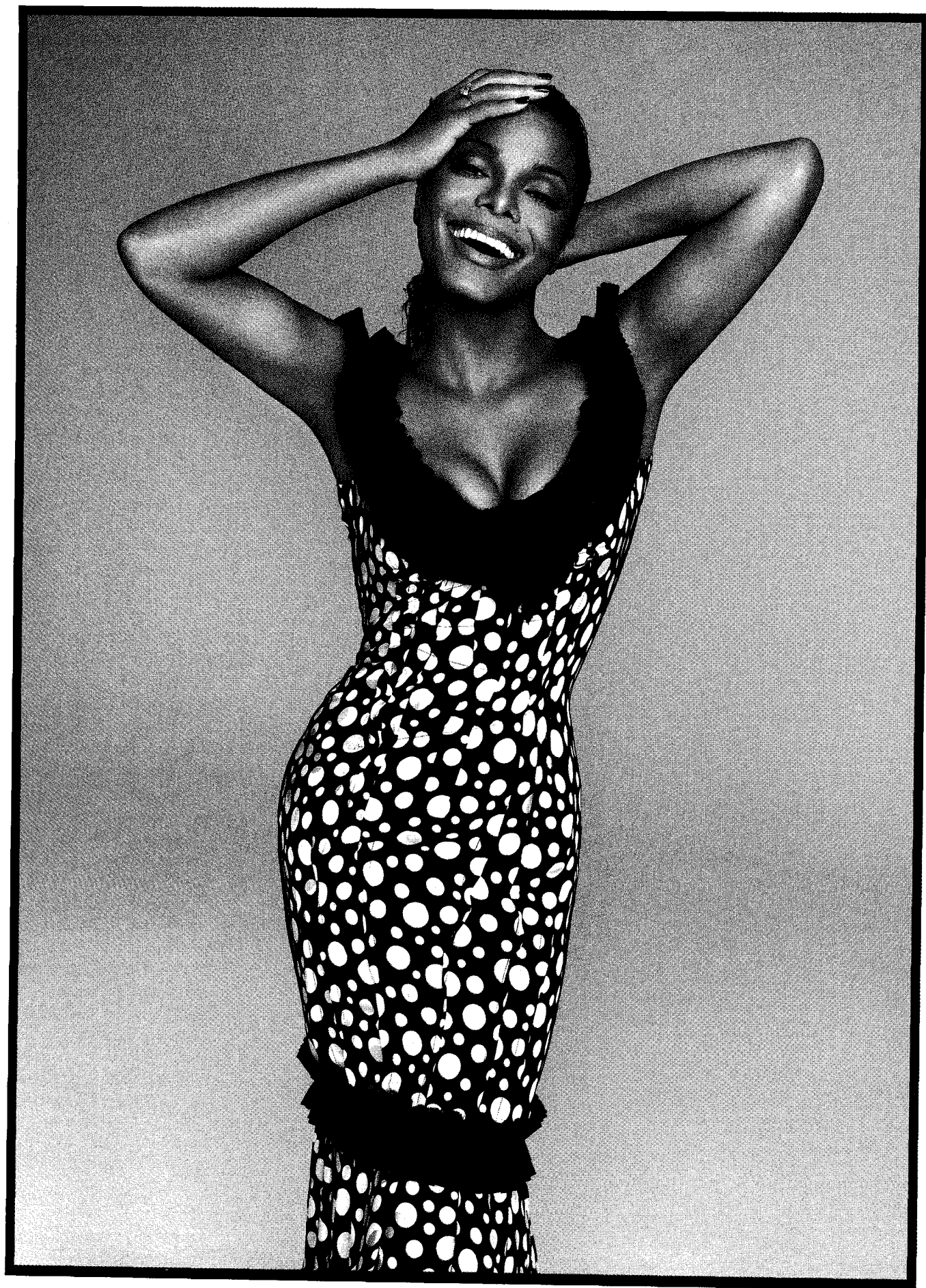
"Control" and "Rhythm Nation" succeeded because of the music, not the artist. The albums might have been equally big no matter who was singing, and possibly better, had one of Jackson's more vocally gifted peers—say, Jody Watley—been involved. At her best, Jackson has a small voice, with not much grain or tone. (At her worst, she wanders off pitch.) And though breaking free of her family's influence was a genuine achievement, the independent-young-woman persona she adopted on "Control" and "Rhythm Nation" felt just as contrived as the wholesome character she played on TV. It wasn't until 1993, when Jackson released "Janet," that she became a musician with a sound (gentle but funky) and a topic (sex and sexuality) of her own. (Admittedly, "13 Y.O." would have worked less well as a title.)

"Janet" seemed to draw inspiration from Madonna's album "Erotica," which was released the previous year. Although Jackson is the lesser artist, the two have some affinities: both are sing-

ers of average ability who dance well and carefully control their public images. "Erotica" was Madonna's transition from aerobic dance music to slower tempos, more varied textures, and a complex view of sex. Within four years, Madonna was on to something else, but Jackson stuck with the style, making high-tech, medium-temperature, low-impact bedroom music her signature. "That's the Way Love Goes" was the biggest hit from "Janet," spending eight weeks at No. 1. The conceit is a standard seduction scenario—candles, undressing, sexual abandon—but Jackson makes it believable. Jam and Lewis provide her with a loop from James Brown's "Papa Don't Take No Mess," and pad it with a second guitar and soft keyboards. This spare music allows Jackson to drop into her natural voice, a near-whisper. She is unable to perform the clichés—high notes, melismatic runs—that might tempt a more dramatic singer. Her simplicity draws you in.

Jackson's forte is not bump and grind or dazzling philosophical smut. Despite the spectacular wardrobe malfunction, the flashy ensemble dancing, and the killer abs, she wants to examine sex as an intimate experience and prefers to keep the music down while she's talking. Given her vocal limitations, this would have been wise even if she had nothing to say. But, in her modest way, she does. She has devoted entire albums to parsing how, as she put it on "Velvet Rope" (1997), "this special need that's within us brings out the best yet worst in us." (Of course, in pop music success has nothing to do with intellectual modesty: ten of Jackson's singles have gone to the top of the charts. Among female artists, only Diana Ross, Whitney Houston, Madonna, and Mariah Carey have had more No. 1 songs.)

Unfortunately, "20 Y.O." is a hodgepodge that fails to make the most of Jackson's quiet strengths. The single "So Excited" is a loud dance tune that is reminiscent of the songs on "Control" and requires Jackson to act tough and predatory in a way that feels forced. The guest rapper Khia, a minor expert in sexual braggadocio, effortlessly dispenses saucy taunts: "Act bad, don't hurt me. Look sexy, talk dirty." Jackson, however,



Jackson's signature is high-tech, medium-temperature, low-impact bedroom music. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

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sounds slightly ludicrous when she sings, "Throw me up against whatever's close and get to bossin' me around."

"Do It 2 Me" is more successful, a return to Jackson's easy conversational style. She is searching for her lover, who is apparently not a new acquaintance: "My first and only call is to you, time after time, babe, throughout my life." The chorus is the request you'd expect, delivered as a playful admonishment: "Come do your job tonight; you got me hot tonight. Watch what you're doing, we ain't moving till you get it right." The music is a mid-tempo swing, understated but firm, punctuated by handclaps and by low swoops of a sampled string section. "Do It 2 Me" is carefully balanced on the line between slow jams—music for groups of two or three—and upscale dance music made for a crowded club. This versatility, combined with Jackson's generally inoffensive nature, may explain how music so unassuming could become so popular. (Or perhaps it's simply that Janet is the only sane Jackson still making records.)

"This Body" is about a more distant, though perhaps more durable, relationship: the one between Jackson and men who have an acute appreciation of her magazine appearances. Jackson addresses her most ardent fans ("Just had to buy me, had to try me, oooh, you're in love with the hottest girl in the magazine"); offers them advice ("What you're lookin' for is right on page 52"); and dangles wish fulfillment before them ("Now would you be ready if I stepped off these pages?"). All this will make some guy very happy. The chorus is for the rest of us, a simple statement that returns to Jackson's central theme: how she feels. When she sings, "This body of mine, you'll go crazy when you see me," she sounds seductive, if a little sleepy. At the end of the chorus, though, she is fully awake, redeeming the song's dopey premise by repeating, but with conviction, the equally dopey verse "Start shakin' and movin' all around." She is riding the album's best beat, sinuous and dark, and the music expands, incorporating a rhythmic pattern of heavy breathing and—metaphor alert—the sound of a jet taking off. Forget her admirers; this is Janet enjoying herself.

Jam and Lewis have worked on all of Jackson's albums since 1986, and they

are co-producers of "20 Y.O.," along with Jackson herself and one notable addition: Jackson's boyfriend of the past four years, the producer Jermaine Dupri. In 1990, when Dupri was seventeen, he produced a song for the rap group Silk Tymes Leather that made *Billboard's* hip-hop and R.&B. chart. Two years later, he produced Kris Kross's song "Jump," which went to No. 1. Now, at the age of thirty-four, Dupri is one of the most consistently employed producers in hip-hop and R.&B. His talent is his anonymity: he has no particular style, and that prevents him from going out of fashion.

Pop-music snobs usually don't rank Dupri as high as they do auteurs like Dr. Dre and the Neptunes, and they fail to recognize his knack for isolating what is best about a trend and exaggerating it to wonderful effect; if Atlanta snap music is spare and weird, he'll make it positively barren and dissonant. He also usually hires a better singer or rapper than the trend's originators could afford. Dupri co-produced much of Mariah Carey's "The Emancipation of Mimi," which was the biggest-selling record of 2005. It seems that, by providing Jackson with a similar mix of dance tunes, hip-hop, slow jams, and ballads, Dupri hoped to give her an equally successful comeback album. (Jackson's last album, "Damita Jo," was a commercial disappointment.) To this end, Dupri, Jam, and Lewis brought in rappers to contribute guest verses, and sampled songs from the eighties. (This practice has nothing to do with Jackson's work from twenty years ago; these days, samples of eighties tunes sell songs.)

With a few exceptions, what Jackson's production team has come up with is no match for the minimalist come-ons of current R.&B. singers like Ciara or the lush balladeering of singers like Carey. Much of "20 Y.O." is simply pleasant, professional, and ultimately forgettable music suspended between styles. The album is best when it lets Jackson relax, as she does on the gorgeous "Take Care," which bears an odd resemblance to her brother Michael's song "Human Nature." It is unabashedly sweet music, full of space. Slowly, she makes her way toward you. It seems only right to make the next move, and inch a little closer. ♦

THE REVOLUTIONIST

The worldly idealist at the heart of Stoppard's "Coast of Utopia."

BY KEITH GESSEN

The Russian radical writer and philosopher Alexander Herzen loved Rome for its warmth and spontaneity, but he was a little chagrined to find himself there when the revolution of 1848 erupted in Paris, seven hundred miles away. Luckily, the Romans were equal to the event. As Herzen watched, they gathered at the embassy of the oppressive Austrians, pulled down the enormous imperial coat of arms, stomped on it, then hitched it to a donkey and dragged it through the streets. "An amazing time," Herzen wrote to his Russian friends. "My hand shakes when I pick up a paper, every day there is something unexpected, some peal of thunder." He raced to Paris, where the provisional government was handing out grants, like some gonzo arts foundation, to anyone willing to spread the revolution abroad. Herzen's old friend the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin had already started east to foment revolution against the Tsar; another friend, the German Romantic poet Georg Herwegh, was raising a battalion of émigré workers and intellectuals to march on Baden-Baden. Herzen stayed in Paris to see what would happen next.

Nothing good, as it turned out. The liberal provisional government, challenged by the radical Paris workers, called in the National Guard and unleashed a slaughter. Bakunin was arrested in Dresden, commencing a long journey through the prisons of Europe. And Herwegh's battalion was routed by the Prussian Army outside Baden-Baden, the poet returning to Paris in disgrace. "Our hero could no more bear the

smell of gunpowder," his rival Heinrich Heine jeered, "than Goethe could that of tobacco." Within a few months, the revolutionary tide had rolled back all across Europe.

Herzen, heartbroken by the developments, announced that he was turning inward: if society was not ready to be liberated from a crumbling order,



Herzen was a memoirist of genius, but a dud as a political prophet.

individuals could at least save themselves, as he put it, "from the danger of falling ruins." He and Herwegh began to discuss plans for a two-family commune. The events of 1848 had left the Herweghs without resources, but Herzen had managed to get his assets out of Russia, foiling the Tsar's attempt to seize them. "Money is indepen-

dence and power, it is a weapon," he explained, unapologetically. "And no one throws away a weapon in time of war, even if it comes from the enemy and is a little rusty." He found the two families a house in Nice, and together they moved there in the middle of 1850. Herzen was unaware that six months earlier his beloved wife, Natalie, had begun a serious affair with Herwegh.

On the day that Herzen finally learned about it, he found himself standing with Herwegh on a sheer rock cliff overlooking the sea at Nice. He was out of his mind with rage. "Why didn't I immediately start a conversation or push him off the bluff into the sea?" he later wondered. He'd been betrayed by Herwegh—but how, exactly? Didn't he believe that people should break away from traditional bonds of family and religion? That the old world was dying? And how, assuming that Herwegh was unequivocally at fault, was Herzen to take revenge? He was an aristocrat, and aristocrats—Pushkin, for example—fought duels, but Herzen believed that duelling was barbaric. Lamely, he asked Herwegh whether he'd read a certain novel by George Sand; Herwegh claimed not to remember, and slithered off to the bookshop. It was the last they saw of each other.

What happened next—in a cascade of vicious letters, letters in response, unopened letters, letters that were claimed to have been unopened, and letters spread around Nice and Zurich and Geneva—became a major scandal on the European left. It seemed to carry a lesson about the dangers of the new ideas. The German socialist Arnold Ruge wrote a five-act verse drama, "The New World," based on the events; Marx gossiped about them to Engels. Herwegh told everyone who would listen that Herzen was keeping Natalie against her will; Herzen defended himself to his allies in the revolu-



"It's a Calatrava."

tionary movement. "I belong to the new society to which you and your friends belong," he wrote to the French anarchist Proudhon. "I belong to the revolution to which Mazzini and his disciples belong." They responded warmly, politely. But what could they do?

The episode is both awful and absurd. Even Tom Stoppard's witty, crowded nine-hour play about Herzen and his circle, *"The Coast of Utopia"*—over the next several months, it will be performed at Lincoln Center in three parts—skirts most of this material, despite managing to incorporate just about every significant event (and speech!) in Russian intellectual history between 1833 and 1868. For Stoppard, a playwright who has made a specialty of illuminating, with a gentle, probing intelligence, the private lives of public figures, what Herzen called his "family drama" may have been too private. It is also just too sad: In late 1851, at the height of the scandal, Herzen's mother and his young son Kolya drowned at sea. Natalie fell ill, a situation that was compounded by another pregnancy. In the spring of 1852, she and the child died.

Reeling and agitated—"I feel all the faintheartedness of my behavior," he wrote to a friend, "but everything is so terribly

broken inside"—Herzen moved to London, and began to write his bitter tale.

The result, *"My Past and Thoughts,"* is one of the most remarkable books in the Russian canon. In attempting to explain Herwegh's perfidy, Herzen had first to explain whom it had been perpetrated against. And who was Herzen? In 1852, he was forty years old, a sharp-tongued aristocrat, a fervent revolutionary, and a writer of genius. He had refused the Tsar's order to return to Russia, and so had also become an exile. "I have lived too long as a free man," he explained, "to allow myself to be chained again." This last fact was especially notable because, more than anyone in his generation, Herzen identified himself with Russia. From the very first sentence of his memoirs, he was able to connect his life with the great currents of the preceding half century. He was born in 1812, the year Napoleon's Grand Armée entered Russia—and not only in 1812 but in Moscow, as it was being evacuated and set on fire. Herzen's father had neglected to remove his family in time, so he had to seek a special audience with Napoleon to get them all out. "Tales of the fire of Moscow, of the battle of Borodino . . . of the taking of Paris were

my cradle songs, my nursery stories, my Iliad and my Odyssey," Herzen wrote.

How did someone born to the top caste of a rigid, traditional society—and imbued with this deep patriotism—come to reject the bases of that society? That is the central question of the memoirs. As always with Herzen, the personal was bound up with the political. In early adolescence, he learned that his father had never got around to marrying his mother, rendering Herzen illegitimate. Then, on December 14, 1825, a group of officers who had returned from Western Europe after the Napoleonic Wars held a demonstration in Petersburg demanding that the Tsar grant a constitution. The so-called Decembrists were crushed, and the leaders—the flower of the educated nobility, friends of Pushkin and readers of Voltaire—were hanged.

The executions made an indelible impression on Herzen, who watched Nicholas I's subsequent march into Moscow ("He always looked like a slightly bald Medusa") with disgust. He soon befriended a young man named Nicholas Ogarev, and the two swore a "Hannibalistic oath" to avenge the fallen heroes of December 14th. Less than a decade later, Herzen and Ogarev were under arrest for having formed what was little more than an anti-tsarist book club.

Herzen's Russian, in the memoirs, is clear and classical, like that of his friend and contemporary Turgenev, and Herzen, like Turgenev, has a romantic tenderness for Russia and for childhood. But, every few pages, Herzen's memoir interrupts itself to make quick, acerbic comments about a screaming injustice. "That was my first journey through Russia," he writes at the end of his story about the family's exit from Moscow in 1812, escorted first by Napoleon's cavalry, then by Ukrainian Cossacks. His second journey, he continues dryly, took place without such exalted company: "I was alone, and next to me sat a drunken gendarme."

The gendarme escorted Herzen to his first stint of internal exile, where he would spend four years for his anti-tsarist sentiments. During this time, he struck up an intense correspondence with his cousin Natalie and eloped with her in the middle of 1838. They had a son, Sasha, and the next year were allowed to return to Moscow.

Herzen found the city in an intellectual frenzy: the Russians had discovered Hegel, and, as always, they were taking things too seriously. Herzen's friend Visarion Belinsky, the literary critic, was an especially rhapsodic Hegelian, unhampered by his lack of German. But young Bakunin was the worst: He "learned German from Kant and Fichte and then set to work upon Hegel, whose method and logic he mastered to perfection—and to whom did he not preach it afterward? To us and to Belinsky, to ladies and Proudhon."

Herzen himself was soon immersed in Hegel. He recognized the significance of the debate: in the wake of Napoleon, Hegel had announced a philosophy of history in which each country contributed through its genius to the development of the World Spirit. Mired in serfdom, tyranny, and daily violence, Russia had been left out. In response, the Russians split into two camps: Westernizers, who wanted to remedy Russia's backwardness, and Slavophiles, who thought it should be lovingly preserved. Herzen became a Westernizer, though he argued with one camp and then the other, wrote abstruse articles about the *Weltgeist* for the literary magazines, and then argued some more.

These arguments—as well as the irresistible historical connections afforded by such a small and influential élite—are the main reason that Stoppard's play is nine hours long. Audiences may even suspect that they've seen these Russians before, on their country estates, arguing interminably among themselves about the meaning of life and the direction of history. This is Peter from "The Cherry Orchard," this is Uncle Vanya. But two generations separate Chekhov from Herzen; by the eighteen-nineties, history had indeed overtaken Uncle Vanya. It had not done so when Herzen began his journey. Then, as he wrote beautifully, "The Russia of the future existed exclusively among a few boys, hardly more than children, so insignificant and unnoticed that there was room for them between the soles of the great boots of the autocracy and the ground." His generation was the best educated and most privileged in Russian history, and incarnated a uniquely optimistic moment: the old world was on its way out; the question was merely what they would replace it with. If, for the time being, they talked and talked, it was be-

cause they lived in a police state that outlawed everything other than talk, and sometimes that, too.

They hashed over their personal relationships with equal fervor. The last of the European Romantics—the British historian E. H. Carr shrewdly titled his 1933 book about them "The Romantic Exiles"—they believed they must be progressive in their private as well as their political lives. The men and women of Herzen's circle kept a constant surveillance of their feelings and the feelings of those around them, to make sure that everyone was happy. In the course of their endless correspondence, their all-night conversations, their complicated marriages, they analyzed and analyzed. "Tell Melgunov that there may really be some element lacking in our friendship," Herzen wrote offhandedly to one friend. To the mild-mannered Ogarev he remarked, "You have the strongest character of anyone I know—it is the strength of weakness. . . . You have a broad comprehension of everything that is human, and a dull incomprehension of everything that is particular to Ogarev." The courtship letters of Natalie and Herzen are filled with reflections on Schiller and the religion of love. When Ogarev's first marriage began to fall apart—his wife cheated on him with every literary journalist in Moscow—all their friends reread Goethe, and George Sand, and talked about the morality of matrimony. Herzen concluded that marriage without love was a crime; Natalie believed this with all her heart.

As the eighteen-forties progressed, Herzen became a fixture in the literary magazines; he even wrote a novel, "Who Is to Blame?" about a love triangle. (Everyone was to blame.) But real thought and real action were impossible under the police regime of Nicholas I. "So long as we were arguing that Goethe was objective but that his objectivity was subjec-

tive," as Herzen put it, "while Schiller as a poet was subjective but that his subjectivity was objective, and vice versa," things were fine; but the censorship would become ruinous, he knew, as soon as writers began to address political subjects. Many of Herzen's contemporaries succumbed to despair, retiring to their estates and various forms of dissipation. They became—gentle, alcoholic Ogarev for a time was a perfect specimen—"superfluous men." Some of the more ambitious went abroad. In 1847, a year after Herzen's father died and made him the richest socialist revolutionary in Europe, he followed them.

He was, it seemed, right on time. The steppes of Russia closed behind him—a year after his departure, Nicholas I imposed severe travel restrictions—while Europe stood on the brink of the transformation he'd been waiting for since the Decembrists were hanged. And then it failed. The simultaneous collapse of both his marriage and the 1848 uprisings was the major blow of Herzen's life. Politically, he concluded that a premature revolution would inevitably lead to a crushing reaction. (Lenin, who loved Herzen's writings, drew a slightly different conclusion: one can picture him reading with glee the scenes of social-democratic incompetence that Herzen describes so well.) Personally, he decided that everything was finished for him. In the years to come, he repeatedly returned to this moment. "The event draws a line through my life," he wrote. It was, he believed, an "end to my personal life."

But life never ends just like that. Herzen wrote the first four parts of "My Past and Thoughts" between 1852 and 1855. It was immediately acknowledged as a masterpiece and widely translated. "It's a wonder," Turgenev told him. "It possesses a kind of manly and artless truth." Marx learned to read Russian by studying it; Nabokov, a few generations later, recalled that it was his father's favorite book. Isaiah Berlin considered it "a literary masterpiece to be placed by the side of the novels of his contemporaries and countrymen, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky."

This is not quite right. Herzen's book is a loose, baggy monster that lacks the dramatic tension and economy of "Fathers and Sons." Turgenev was the first



realist novelist in Russia; his books were wonderfully normal, as if Russia were like other places, even if Russians weren't quite like other people. Herzen's memoirs are, in contrast, fundamentally generative: he saw everything in Russia as though for the first time. Perhaps it was just his natural skepticism ("I see you are going to poke fun," Bakunin tells him), or perhaps it was his reading of Hegel, but nothing seems natural to Herzen. "Where do these people come from?" he asks upon seeing an uncommonly disciplined-looking officer in full military regalia. "He must have flogged soldiers in his day for the way they paraded." He is never so amused by absurd injustice that he ceases to be outraged, but never so outraged that he ceases to be amused. Having been told to report for an interrogation by the head of the secret police, he is struck by the aristocratic collegiality of the request: "It was exactly as if we'd agreed to go to Smurov's for oysters."

And whereas Turgenev's characters are always rendered with a distanced precision, Herzen is frankly enamored of his friends. "He could not preach or lecture; what he needed was a quarrel," he wrote of Belinsky, who died of consumption in 1848:

If he met with no objection, if he was not stirred to irritation, he did not speak well, but when he felt stung, when his cherished convictions were called in question, when the muscles of his cheeks began to quiver and his voice to burst out, then he was worth seeing; he pounced on his opponent like a panther, he tore him to pieces, made him a ridiculous, a piteous object, and incidentally developed his own thought, with unusual power and poetry. The dispute would often end in blood, which flowed from the sick man's throat; pale, gasping, with his eyes fixed on the man with whom he was speaking, he would lift his handkerchief to his mouth with shaking hand and stop, deeply mortified, crushed by his physical weakness. How I loved and how I pitied him at those moments!

This is much more than the description of an individual. Like Emerson's early essays, it inaugurates a national style. Herzen does this sociologically and through the dramatic retelling of literary and intellectual history; Emerson did so through exhortation and reflections on nature. (This is why Russia has literary and philosophical debate, and we have "Snow Falling on Cedars.") The memoirs became, as Isaiah Berlin beautifully put it, a Noah's Ark, into which Herzen stowed

the people he loved before the terrible storm that was sure to sweep them away.

The composition of the memoirs returned Herzen to the world. In early 1853, he purchased a printing press and Cyrillic fonts and, with the help of a group of Polish exiles, began printing books and sending them to Russia. He started by publishing his own work, including his book of essays on 1848, "From the Other Shore," with its famous dedicatory preface to his teen-age son, Sasha: "We do not build, we destroy; we do not proclaim a new truth, we abolish an old lie. Contemporary man only builds the bridge; another, unknown man of the future will walk across it. You perhaps will see it. I beg of you: *Do not remain on this shore.*" Soon came the Crimean War, which Russia lost, and the death of Nicholas I, whom Herzen loathed. Change was afoot! He launched a literary magazine, *The Polar Star*, in which he serialized "My Past and Thoughts." In 1856, his childhood friend Ogarev arrived from Russia with his new wife. Encouraged by tales of his work's reception in his homeland, Herzen joined Ogarev to start the monthly, and later fortnightly, newspaper, *The Bell*.

The Bell and *The Polar Star* were a revelation. They were mailed into Russia and smuggled into Russia—and read by everyone. *The Polar Star* contained long philosophical essays, Herzen's memoirs, and classic banned works, like Pushkin's pro-Decembrist poems. *The Bell*, more timely, consisted of political statements, compromising materials on government officials, and letters from all corners of the empire. Above all, though, they were written by free men, who did not cringe before the censor, who could call plainly for the abolition of serfdom, say, instead of "the rational allocation of economic forces." Finally, they were mostly written by Herzen, and Herzen could really write. His words leaped from the page and

danced, and when they needed to they stung. Here he is thundering at the gentry about serfdom:

We are slaves because our great-grandfathers sold their human dignity for inhumane rights, and we profit from them. We are slaves because we are masters. We are servants because we are landowners, and landowners without any belief in our rights. We are serfs because we keep our brothers against their will who are our equals by birth, by blood, and by language.

With Herzen's publications, the years between 1855 and 1861 became one of those strange, hopeful interludes that punctuate Russian history, when it seems as if all the country's humiliations and failures might be righted by the efforts of a few just men. Young people collected money and travelled to London to tell Herzen they would die for him—and to ask him how they should live. (Herzen invariably suggested that they help with distribution.) He gave money to poor political émigrés, and to those in Russia he gave hope. Bakunin, upon escaping from Siberia, in 1861, headed straight to the Herzen household. Two forces contended in Russia during those years: Alexander II, Tsar of all the Russias, and Alexander Herzen, whose name couldn't even be mentioned in print.

Even as Herzen achieved success with *The Bell*, he managed to get involved, incredibly, in another love triangle. Ogarev had lost his riches during his divorce, and so he and his second wife, Natalie—who had once been the closest friend of Natalie Herzen—had moved into Herzen's house upon arriving in London. Before long, Natalie Ogarev developed feelings for Herzen. Ogarev let her go quietly—he did not believe in marriage, and, what's more, he was sterile. Soon Natalie was pregnant with a daughter, Liza, and Ogarev had taken up with an English prostitute named Mary Sutherland, whom he'd met at a bar.

Stoppard, this time, is more than equal to the madness of the triangle. He weaves it into the fabric of Herzen's political life: as the domestic arrangement begins to unravel, so, too, does the standing of *The Bell*. In the years leading up to the emancipation of the serfs, in 1861, Herzen threw his support behind the liberal policy of emancipation "with land." But the young people who had been reared on Herzen's political writings wanted more.



Morbidly sincere where Herzen was quick and ironic, "scientific" where he was romantic, contemptuous of art and unable, in Herzen's words, to eat a good meal without gnashing their teeth, they were the "sons," depicted with a certain amount of sympathy by Turgenev; ten years later, having radicalized and degenerated, they became "the Possessed" depicted with pure venom by Dostoyevsky. They criticized Herzen for thinking that tsarist Russia could be reformed when it needed to be destroyed, and they repeatedly pleaded with him to call for Russians to rise up against their oppressors. Herzen resisted.

In an inspired scene, Stoppard imagines the famous but unrecorded London visit of the young radicals' leader, Nikolai Chernyshevsky. He has come from Petersburg to have it out at last with Herzen, whom he used to worship, but finds the great man surrounded by bedlam: Natalie is hysterical, Ogarev has brought Mary Sutherland over for the first time, the kids are running around, and the nearsighted Chernyshevsky can't tell whose children are whose. (They're all Herzen's.) He feels humiliated. In the play, as in history, the radicals and Herzen never see eye to eye again. The emancipation, when it came, was onerous to the peasants, proving the radicals right. Two years later, Herzen supported a Polish uprising against the tsarist Army and lost the liberals. (In a clash between Russian serfs and Russian landowners, your sympathies might be determined by your politics. But a clash between Russians and Poles was a clash between Russians and Poles.) The circulation of *The Bell* plummeted. And though Herzen and Natalie and Ogarev and Mary settled down somewhat, no one was entirely happy or calm or in the right.

Herzen's last years were spent fitfully trying to revive *The Bell* and dashing through Europe to sort out the tangled lives of his children. Sasha had earned a medical degree but wasn't practicing medicine; his eldest daughter, Tata, kept getting involved with men Herzen didn't approve of. Natalie threatened to take their daughter Liza back to Russia if Herzen didn't marry her. Meanwhile, Chernyshevsky was arrested; the younger generation grew more radical. "The Decembrists were our great fathers," Herzen wrote to Ogarev. "These . . . are our prodigal sons." In 1866, a student in Petersburg fired a

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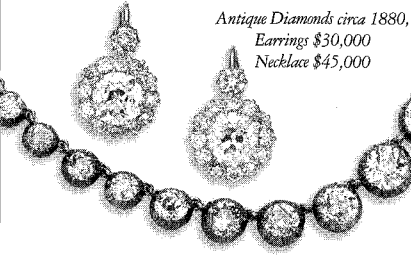


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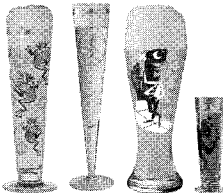
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pistol at the Tsar, inaugurating the modern age of political terror. He, too, would have read Herzen as a youth.

Stoppard ends his monumental play in 1868, on a note of despair and futility and impending disaster. Herzen is left with his ten-year-old daughter, Liza, whom he asks for a kiss. She obliges happily. But, as the lights fade, we know that the revolution is coming, merciless and terrible—and we also know, if we know about Herzen, that five years after his death little Liza, seventeen and depressed about an unhappy love affair, committed suicide by smothering herself with a chloroform-soaked cloth.

Alexander Herzen, the most noble, humane, passionate, and touching figure of the Russian nineteenth century, gets dusted off every fifty years or so, when liberalism feels that it is in crisis. This happened in 1912, his centenary, when Lenin fought over him with those he called “the knights of liberal verbiage,” and again in the nineteen-fifties, when Isaiah Berlin produced the essays about Herzen that later formed the core of his classic “Russian Thinkers.” And this is fair enough: Herzen was one of the first to experience fully, in both his personal and his political life, the crisis of in-betweenness that was to characterize the best of progressive thought for the next century and a half.

The trouble with this in-betweenness, of course, is that it makes it difficult to say what, exactly, Herzen was for. (“The abolition of serfdom from above or below,” Stoppard’s Ogarev says, “except from below.”) Berlin solved the problem by turning him into the ultimate skeptic of history and progress, explaining very clearly what he was against. “We have marveled enough at the deep abstract wisdom of nature and history,” Berlin quotes Herzen declaring. “It is time to realize that nature and history are full of the accidental and the senseless, of muddles and bungling.” This is a Herzen of perpetual negation and disillusionment, a Cold War Herzen, a British Herzen, and, for the most part, this is Stoppard’s Herzen, too.

There were other Herzens, though, and other possible endings to Stoppard’s play. Herzen was a great negative thinker, but he was also the founder of Russia’s peculiar brand of messianic socialism,

whereby the backward nation would save Europe by bypassing all forms of capitalist development and simply performing, as Marx put it, a “somersault into the anarchist-socialist-atheist millennium.” He thought that Russia would win the Crimean War, that the peasant commune could form the basis for socialist government, that Europe was exhausted and beyond rescue. He told the students to go “to the people,” and they did. He became a gradualist, but he was never a liberal; he approvingly quotes Proudhon: “I reject your constitution, not only because it is bad, but because it is a constitution.”

As a political prophet, then, Herzen was a bust. What one finds so moving about him is, instead, his capacity for self-examination and his commitment to ordinary life. Unlike the great, blithe fanatics of the revolutionary movement, he always wondered if he might be wrong. “I am angry with you and with myself,” he wrote to Ogarev in 1866, “that we weren’t able to make anything out of our lives for ourselves.” In his diary, he confessed, “We all thought we could get away with everything. No one got away with anything.”

But he never made an idol of his disillusionment; he never turned his failure into a principle of action. Herzen had failed to save Natalie, and then failed with the other Natalie, but when he heard, in late 1869, that his daughter Tata was in trouble, he raced to Florence to help her. Tata had experienced a nervous breakdown after a failed engagement to an Italian intellectual, who had begun to behave viciously in the wake of the affair. “I have found my Herwegh,” she told her father. Yet she had also found her Herzen. He sat by her bedside until she recovered. Then he took her to Paris.

It was January, 1870, and the capital of world revolution was once again in turmoil. The streets were filled with protesters, and the halls were filled with meetings. Herzen took it all in. “History is being decided here,” he wrote excitedly to Ogarev, who, Herzen lamented, was wasting his time in provincial Geneva. In those final weeks of his life, before he succumbed suddenly to inflammation of the lungs, the most sardonic member of his generation—the scourge not only of the Tsar but of radical blowhards and utopian schemers—was seen going from meeting to meeting, like a young revolutionary. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

One Good Turn, by *Kate Atkinson* (Little, Brown; \$24.99). The second installment of the author's Jackson Brodie detective series is a complex jigsaw: when the driver of a rented Peugeot collides with a bat-wielding thug in a Honda Civic during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the outcome is seen through the eyes of numerous characters, including the whey-faced writer of cozy mysteries who comes to the driver's aid, the sardonic wife of a crooked real-estate developer, and Brodie himself, now retired and disgruntled about getting involved. The first Brodie book, "Case Histories," was propelled by a nuanced, psychological portrait of loss; here Atkinson's authoritative voice emerges only sporadically, and abrupt changes of scene disrupt the flow. Still, some of the characters, such as a snappy, overwhelmed single mother and cop, are finely rendered.

Troubling Love, by *Elena Ferrante, translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein* (Europa; \$14.95). This slender novel is set in motion by the strange circumstances surrounding a death, but it is more concerned with the enigma of memory and self. Delia, a cartoonist living in Rome, receives three incoherent phone calls from her mother, who is supposed to be on her way from Naples; the next day, her mother's nearly naked body washes up onshore at a seaside resort town. In Naples for the funeral, Delia is confronted with the past she tried to disown as she struggles to make sense of the events leading to her mother's drowning. A shadowy figure named Caserta, the man Delia, as a five-year-old, accused her mother of having an affair with, reemerges as possibly the last person to see her alive. Ferrante's polished language belies the rawness of her imagery, which



conveys perversity, violence, and bodily functions in ripe detail. Delia's discovery of the secret of her childhood is made all the more jarring by the story's disorienting mixture of fantasy and reality.

The Trouble with Diversity, by *Walter Benn Michaels* (Metropolitan; \$23). In this cogent jeremiad, which is certain to be controversial, Michaels diagnoses America's love of diversity as one of our greatest problems. Not only does it reinforce ideas of racial essentialism that it claims to repudiate; it obscures the crevasse between rich and poor. Michaels, a scholar of American literature, suggests that the growth of economic inequality over the past few decades is the result of a deeply ingrained and unchallenged class structure. Scrutinizing current events and religion, he argues that our fixation with the "phantasm" of race promotes identity over ideology, and he rejects the idea that meritocracy prevails in America's elite universities. A believer in the power of progressive politics, he calls for a debate in which class, rather than identity, would be at the fore.

Auschwitz Report, by *Primo Levi, with Leonardo De Benedetti, translated from the Italian by Judith Woolf* (Verso; \$17.95). After the Red Army liberated Auschwitz, in 1945, the Russian command asked two ex-prisoners, Primo Levi, a young chemist, and his friend Leonardo De Benedetti, a physician, to write a report on the camp's sanitary and medical arrangements. The following year, when the two men got home, they published their report in a medical journal and forgot about it. In this volume it appears in English for the first time. As Robert S. C. Gordon says in his thoughtful introduction, the book is important not just because it is the first published work by Levi; it contains the seeds of his great "Survival in Auschwitz." This was the source of that book's remarkable chapter on the camp's infirmary. Stylistically, too, the "Report" can be seen as a trial run. It has the same noble sobriety as "Survival in Auschwitz," lit with flashes of irony. The supreme irony, of course, is that Auschwitz had an infirmary at all.

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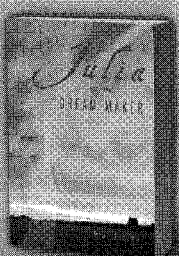
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THE THEATRE

HUMAN SHIELD

The making of an activist.

BY JOHN LAHR

In a one-person show, the most important question is not where to start the story but why to tell it. The actor needs a compelling reason, beyond vanity, to step from the wings onto the stage. There has to be both need and news; there rarely is. One exception is the riveting "My Name Is Rachel Corrie" (at the Minetta Lane, under the deft direction of Alan Rickman, who also co-edited the play, with the journalist Katharine Viner). "Rachel Corrie" is a ventriloquist's act in which the bright, fine-boned Megan Dodds, who radiates a sense of both privilege and pluck, resuscitates from diary entries and e-mails the voice and being of the American pro-Palestinian activist Rachel Corrie, who died at the age of twenty-three. For most of her life, Corrie was haunted by the suffering in the world. In the play, which is a kind of ghost story, she returns to haunt us.

On March 16, 2003, Corrie, wearing a bright-orange jacket and holding a bullhorn, tried to shield the home of a Palestinian civilian in a refugee camp in the Rafah area of the Gaza Strip, one of three thousand homes that were demolished by Israeli forces between 2001 and 2003. She was crushed to death by an Israeli Caterpillar. In the subsequent furor, Corrie was labelled both a traitor and a martyr. (The New York Theatre Workshop, which was originally supposed to produce the play, dropped it, because of Corrie's "controversial" views.) She was neither. By the evidence of her own words—and this takes nothing away from the poetic power of her testimony or the tragedy of her death—she was, it seems, an ascetic hysteric. "I think it is a good idea for us all to drop everything and devote our lives to making this stop," Corrie e-mailed her mother, of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "I still really want to dance around to Pat Benatar and have boyfriends and make comics for my co-workers. But I also want this to stop."

During the play, we see an eerie video clip of Corrie at age ten, speaking eloquently and precociously at her school's fifth-grade press conference on world hunger. "My dream is to save the forty thousand people who die each day," she says. Listening to her proclamations as a girl—"We have got to understand that they dream our dreams and we dream theirs"—one gets the sense that the child is an understudy for an adult. She is clearly porous, a vessel for the projections of others. In the texts from which the play is drawn, Corrie, who grew up, the youngest of three children, in the Arcadian liberal sanctuary of Olympia, Washington, claims to owe a great deal to her mother. "You gave me a potential," she writes, adding, "You made me." Corrie also seems to have absorbed her mother's political narrative. She describes a trip to a Seattle bookstore, where her mother buys her some books, including one on delinquency. "I'm sure she was hoping I'd become a bank robber," Corrie says. "My mother would never admit it, but she wanted me exactly how I turned out—scattered and deviant and too loud." Most of the e-mails cited here are addressed to Corrie's mother, whom Corrie describes as "very involved . . . overly involved sometimes," and whom she perceives, variously, as a co-conspirator ("Maybe you should try to get Dad to quit his neo-liberal job") and a colossus. "Sometimes my mother is up there, bobbing in the sky like Macy's Parade balloons," she says. "So big she looms over everything."

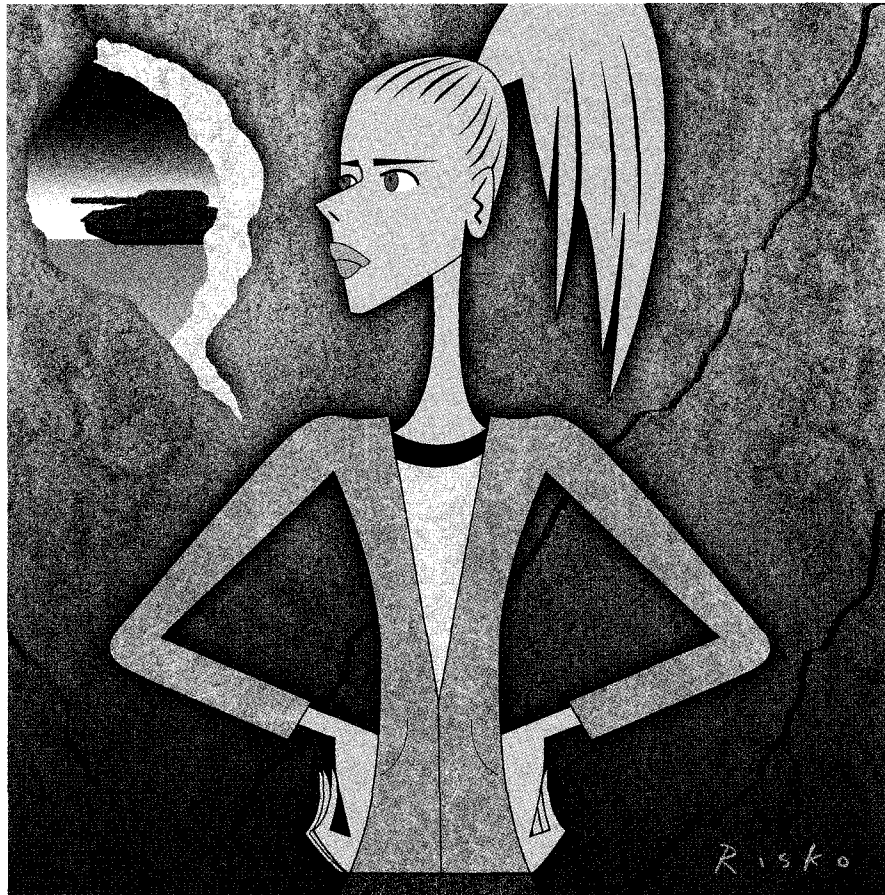
The set at the Minetta Lane is divided between Corrie's cluttered, red-walled American bedroom and the bullet-pocked stucco walls of the Palestinian refugee encampment where she died. Corrie's journey is from one side of the stage to the other, a shift from surreal optimism to surreal devastation. "I'm building the world myself," she says. From the first words she delivers—

addressing her ceiling from beneath the covers on her bed—she is clearly self-dramatizing. She is “the bad other girl” who reads fashion magazines and makes a mess of her room, painting it the color of “carnage.” She’s the renegade who chooses Evergreen State College over the more prestigious academic path of her siblings, “my Economics-major-high-achiever-khaki-and-high-heels-Yalie-corporate sister and brother.” She’s the would-be artist and writer, dreaming up lists of “Five People I Wish I’d Met Who Are Dead” and “Five People to Hang Out With in Eternity.” (There’s a jazzy rhythm to Corrie’s words but no consistent authoritative personality behind them.) Long before she puts herself in harm’s way, trying to cow injustice with a show of righteousness, she sets out to throw herself—with tight shirt and newly shaved armpits—in front of her former boyfriend and his “new hoochie-ass girlfriend.” “They’ll drop the spoons in their strawberry milkshake when I slide past,” she says. Corrie professes a love of Salvador Dali; she, too, is given to making grandiose spectacles of herself. On some level, she knows this, observing wryly that, of all the things she has dreamed of becoming, the hardest to give up is Spider-Man. “I’m a junior in college,” she confides to her diary. “I still don’t have the conviction to cross ‘Spider-Man’ off my list.” When she can’t make a myth of her achievements, she makes a myth of her abdications. As she sets off on her radical course—“I’ve had this underlying need to go to a place and meet people who are on the other end of the tax money that goes to fund the U.S. military,” she says—she notes, “I can’t be Picasso. I can’t be Jesus. I can’t save the planet single-handedly. I can wash dishes.”

The play shrewdly does not show Corrie dying; it shows her living, in all her funny, lively, melancholy, and manipulative immediacy. She ponders the misery of the Israeli checkpoints, the nihilism of the humiliated Palestinian population, which has turned suicide bombing into a heroic destiny. She meditates on her own fears and her own death. “If my whole life is going to amount to one shrug and a shake of the head,” she says, “who cares if it comes in eighty years or at eight p.m.” With a

kind of tragic symmetry, the catastrophe that Corrie was perhaps courting comes to her in a dream, almost exactly as it eventually happened. “Had a dream about falling, falling to my death off of something dusty and smooth and crumbling like cliffs in Utah, but I kept holding on,” she says. Corrie, it seems to me, is a far more complex character than this

See” (at the Public, under the direction of Kenny Leon). On four raspberry-colored platforms, cantilevered across the stage like lily pads, Beaty leaps from character to character, as he sings, recites, acts, and declaims about the divisions between his personal history and his race’s impoverishment. In a story line as preposterous as it is porten-



Megan Dobbs as the American girl turned pro-Palestinian activist Rachel Corrie.

play intends her to be, which makes the evening all the more fascinating. Her words bear witness to the deracinating madness of war, a hysteria that infects not only those doing the fighting but also those ambitious to do the saving.

I wonder how it would be for them to arrive in my world,” Corrie says of the refugees she encounters. “I wonder if you can forgive the world for all the years spent existing—just existing—in resistance to the constant attempt to erase you from your home.” The internal war between enslavement and empowerment, between pauperization and privilege, is acted out in the African-American actor and playwright Daniel Beaty’s one-man extravaganza “Emergence-

tous—it includes the sighting of a slave ship near the Statue of Liberty, with the narrator’s demented father at the helm, and an attempt to rescue him on the day of a poetry slam—Beaty shows off his histrionic skills. Although he sails mightily close to cliché at crucial moments—“I’m in a state of emergence-see,” he orates. “And as I emerge I see our bones know an ancient divinity; / and the bones, the bones, the bones they breathe”—the intelligence of what he has to say is never in doubt. Unfortunately, however, self-involvement and self-congratulation on this scale are never an entirely pretty sight, or really a dramatic one. “Emergence-See,” as its title suggests, is more about speechifying than about edifying. ♦

GUILTY AS SIN

In "Shark," James Woods prosecutes the overprivileged.

BY TAD FRIEND

Running through James Woods's persona—the grave robber's face; the jittery, egomaniacal wheedling; the pimp's heart—is a seam of pure delight. No matter who else is in the frame, he's the one you watch, and he's watching himself, too. His signature villains—Roy Cohn, H. R. Haldeman, and Byron De La Beckwith—are juiced on their own charisma, and figure they'll rule in Hell, if it comes to that. The freelancer Woods played in Oliver Stone's "Salvador" saw the possibilities in El Salvador despite the civil war: "Where else can you get a virgin to sit on your face for seven bucks? Seven bucks!"

CBS's brilliant stroke in "Shark" was casting Woods not against type but against situation: his character finds himself, to his surprise, working with others for the common good. When we meet Sebastian Stark, a.k.a. Shark, he's a notorious Los Angeles defense lawyer, a divorced lone wolf, a winner, a prick. Stark rehearses his summations and character assassinations in a mock courtroom in his basement, and believes that he can orchestrate every aspect of his high-profile cases. Rancid with self-regard—he TiVos his trials—he even sings along to his own theme song on the radio: "Mack the Knife." Then a rich slimeball whom he's just sprung on spousal-abuse charges finishes the job, beating his wife to death, and Stark collapses. He lies around the house, drinking and hiding behind his Mosley Tribes sunglasses until he's called on it by his sixteen-year-old daughter, Julie (Danielle Panabaker, a more willowy Judy Garland), in an exchange straight out of "The O.C.":

JULIE: Look, Dad, after the whole Dina Brock thing, it makes perfect sense for you to punish yourself out of guilt.

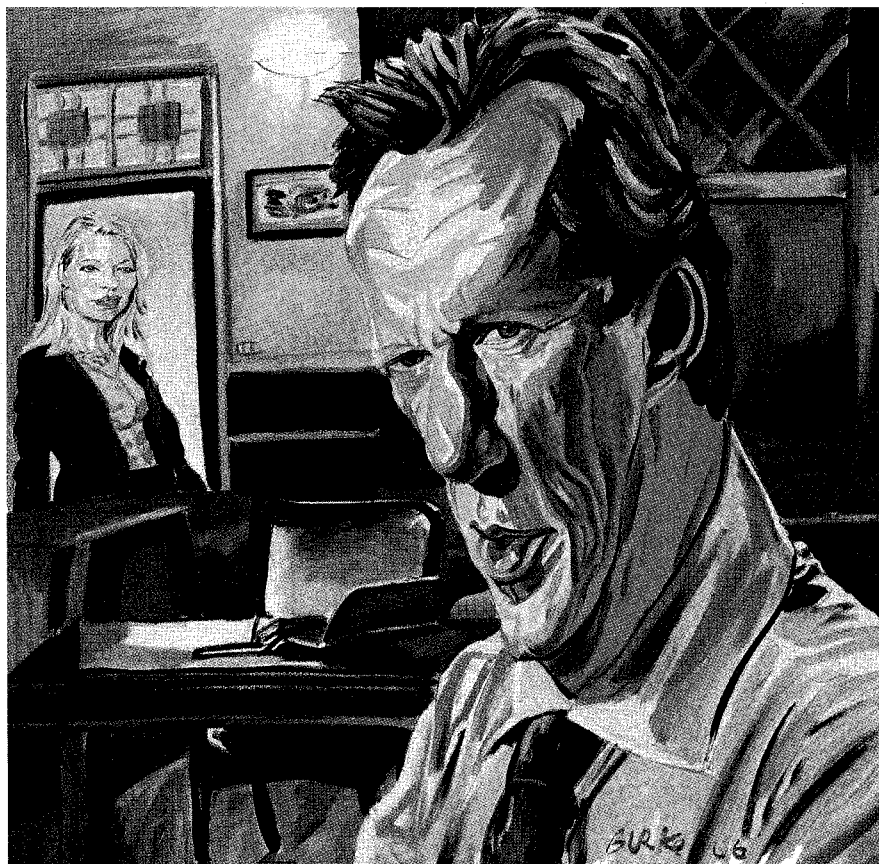
STARK: The white teen Oprah speaks.

It's hard to have a conspicuous mid-life crisis in West L.A., where adults of every generation aspire to look and behave like their children. Already sup-

plied with six sports cars and a sampler of arm candy, Stark decides to trade a few of these totems of youth for the satisfactions of age. His self-aggrandizing world view—"I don't believe in God, and he hates me for it"—no longer serves. So he accepts the mayor's offer to head a new unit in the D.A.'s office, prosecuting the sort of Ferrari-driving

cause of the little guy. In Stark's connected world—O.J.'s lawyer Robert Shapiro and the former Lakers captain Rick Fox have cameos as his pals—the rich have reason to think that punishment is for other people. When he offers his first murderer a plea bargain, she asks, "Are we talking about jail jail or Martha Stewart jail?" She's a singer trying to parlay a Paris Hilton-style sex tape into notoriety, a standard career move in a town where everyone seems to be a waitress-actor or a writer-director. (Stark sheepishly describes one of his dates as a "hyphenate," too: she's a personal trainer-certified nutritionist.) The prosecutor is all too comfortable with the entertainer-perp: she's just his type.

When Stark meets the cub lawyers who make up his unit, we expect the usual



Woods plays a wily attorney whose job is to convict the highfliers he once defended.

drug dealers and football-star rapists he used to defend.

It's a promising setup, because we're accustomed to seeing the Man as a humorless zealot along the lines of Sam Waterston's Savonarola turn in "Law & Order," and to being given permission to root for unscrupulous but charming defense lawyers, most notably James Spader, in "Boston Legal," because they take up the

dream-team assessment: Natasha here has degrees in Mandarin, Inuit, and Farsi; Lex can blow a door using just a corn muffin and a double-A battery; etc. Instead, Stark informs Casey (Sam Page), the winsome state senator's son, that he's "not a rocket scientist"; sums up bookish Martin (Alexis Cruz) as "great on paper; weak on his feet; couldn't close a window"; and terms surly Raina (Sophina Brown)

"a contempt citation waiting to happen." Then he starts molding his misfits into Mini-Mes, teaching them how to bribe bailiffs, poison press coverage, conduct illegal searches, and rat-hole inconvenient evidence, while he imparts Sharkian maxims such as "Truth is relative. Pick one that works" and "Your job is to win. Justice is God's problem."

Stark's smartest and most ruthless disciple is Madeleine (Sarah Carter), who gains a rape witness's trust by falsely claiming that she herself was raped. Because the intended sparring chemistry between Stark and his glamorous boss, the district attorney (a glum Jeri Ryan), never comes off, Madeleine must supply all the show's heat. She has the naughty-librarian bit down, toggling between prim and wanton so fast that her target, Casey, feels like a boy toy, which he is:

CASEY: You flirt with me when no one's looking, you stab me in the back till the boss calls you on it, then you pretend to step up, to get back into his good graces. You're a total freak!

MADELEINE (*after a beat*): So does that mean we're not grabbing a drink later?

I developed a taste for the show's chewy dialogue midway through the pilot, when Stark yells at Billie, another deputy, for neglecting to learn that the murder victim had been in rehab. "If I'm such a major screw-up," she says, fighting back tears, "why don't you fire me?" The textbook response is "Because you worked your tail off" or "Because you'll never make that mistake again" or, perhaps, "Let me tell you about another young lawyer who screwed up big once. . . ." But Stark's reply is bracing: "That's the first helpful suggestion you've had. Good luck with the rest of your career."

Legal dramas have to somehow get us to swallow procedural rules that everyone on the show would have digested years ago; Stark's sarcasm helps the stuff go down easily. Early in each episode, his team rapidly assesses the facts of the case ("torn clothing, bruising, overwhelming evidence of forced intercourse") and the obstacles to conviction ("She went into the room willingly") as he shreds their assumptions. As the unit prepares to charge a doctor with murdering his missing wife, Martin notes, "Technically, we don't need a body for a murder prosecution," and Stark snarls, "Thank you for the tip on

corpus delicti, 'cause I forgot about that part of the first day of law school."

Invariably, a key piece of evidence gets thrown out (TV lawyers seem unfamiliar with witness lists and discovery, and are always stunned by these third-act twists), and Stark blisters his deputies. They then go without sleep until they turn up some fact that he can use to destroy a witness and sway the jury. At this point, however, Stark hesitates; he's unerring at intuiting the real killer, but entirely erring when it comes to the killer's motivation. Suddenly, he's determined not merely to frame a truth but to uncover *the* truth. It helps that the defense lawyers, who are spoken of as bloody-taloned shrieks, sit placidly by as he provokes their clients into shocking confessions and then delivers sermonettes—"Your plan cost a young man's life. It cost Elizabeth Rourke her only child. There is no greater loss"—that would move the greenest paralegal to cry, "Objection: sententious!"

Stark's newfound interest in justice comes largely from his daughter, who, in the pilot, stung him when she remarked, "I really thought you'd changed. Turns out you just changed sides." Their relationship both makes the show float and, at times, threatens to sink it. Julie is a Type A overachiever like her father, only with a lot more therapy, and the fact that the actress who plays her is a mature nineteen accentuates a sexual undercurrent. Stark overreacts when he sees Julie making out with a classmate, and gets the simple business of kissing her good morning wrong, pulling her close and giving her a zesty European smack, as if greeting one of his bimbos at the airport. He seems to have learned parenting from a silverback gorilla: when she fails her driving test, he blackmails the inspector into passing her. Woods has range, though, and there are superbly rueful scenes where he just listens, trying to infer, from her overwrought musings, the damage he's done.

Subtext and subtlety come and go. (It's still network television.) Stark's ex-wife informs him, as she departs for New York and a new marriage, that Julie "is the biggest case you'll ever get. Don't blow it." This idea is repeated periodically, as if it were too complicated to grasp all at once. See, the guy's own child is putting him on trial for his inner life. And he's ready to pay his debt to society because he knows he's

guilty: guilty of love in the first degree.

"Shark" started off as the legal version of "House"—a know-it-all bullies multi-ethnic hotties into helping him solve life-or-death problems. In a feat unexampled for a lead character, Dr. Gregory House has resisted all his colleagues' attempts to saddle him with a mellowing girlfriend or an exonerative diagnosis (Asperger's syndrome?) and has remained a Vicodin-addicted jerk. But the creators of "Shark" seem to believe that Stark should gradually be restored to his law-student ideals, whatever those were. By the fourth episode, when someone calls him Shark he mutters, "I don't go by that anymore." Guess they'll have to rename the show: tune in next week for "The Porpoise-Driven Life."

The lapping tide of gooeyness would be more tolerable if Stark's empathy made him lose a big case, and if that loss got messy. (Why is he so afraid of defeat?) "Shark," though, wants to have it both ways: he keeps winning, but now for the right reasons. When Stark prosecutes the doctor with the missing wife, the key witness turns out to be their young son, Ethan. Raina asks Stark, "You're really going to put a child who just lost his mother on the stand and then tear him apart?" "That's exactly what I'm going to do," Stark says, and proceeds to harry the kid until his father rises to confess. This, we are made to see, is just what Stark had anticipated. He then allows the doctor to plead down to manslaughter, because the man loves his son and because he swears that his wife's death was an accident and, perhaps, because the guy lives in a Craftsman house. (The show's true villains live in glass-and-steel boxes similar to Stark's own—nothing says evil like Le Corbusier.)

To insure that we don't miss the larger implications of Stark's act of mercy—he realizes that Ethan needs a dad, just like his own Julie—the writers have the D.A. ask him afterward, "What if he hadn't stopped you? Would you still have destroyed Ethan?" Just then, the prisoner is being escorted past; Stark's response is to drape his own suit jacket over the doctor's handcuffs, so that Ethan won't be scarred by the sight of them. Of course, visiting his father at Folsom for the next four to eight years may have some effect on the child, but even God can't think of everything. ♦

BATTLE FATIGUE

"Flags of Our Fathers" and "Babel."

BY DAVID DENBY

On the afternoon of February 23, 1945, the Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal, standing at the top of Mt. Suribachi, on Iwo Jima, raised his camera hastily and, without looking through the viewfinder, took the most famous picture of the Second World War. United States forces had landed on the island four days earlier. When the in-

printed on the front page of just about every major newspaper in the United States, became an emblem of the war effort. There were, however, two aspects of the event that few people at home knew: that another flag had been raised earlier that day, only to be pulled down, as the story goes, when the Secretary of the Navy requested it as a souvenir; and



Ryan Phillippe as a Navy corpsman on Iwo Jima in Clint Eastwood's movie.

vading troops captured the mountain, five marines and a Navy corpsman attached an American flag to a heavy water pipe, then stuck the pipe in the ground and began to push it upright. Snapped at that instant, the photograph is an accidental masterpiece of classical construction, with the diagonal line of the pole supported by the surging, upraised arms of the men and balanced, at the base, by a marine poised at a right angle to it. None of the faces are visible, and the bodies seem bronzed, as if some sculptor with a taste for the monumental and the obvious had shaped insensible flesh into an icon of spiritual and patriotic glory. In a little more than a day, the picture,

that the battle on Iwo Jima was to go on for a month more, claiming the lives of three of the six men. (In all, almost seven thousand Americans died there.) After the fighting ended, the remaining flag-raisers—John (Doc) Bradley, Rene Gagnon, and Ira Hayes—were called home and paraded around the country as salesmen-heroes in a fourteen-billion-dollar national War Bond tour. Obsessed with their dead friends, these three ordinary men, the central players in Clint Eastwood's ironic epic, "Flags of Our Fathers," faced their public role with varying degrees of pride, nausea, and guilt, and then were cast aside when they were no longer of use to the military.

John Bradley was the corpsman on Suribachi, and, after his death, in 1994, his son James, working with the writer Ron Powers, reconstructed the event and its aftermath in a book that became a best-seller in 2000. William Broyles, Jr., and Paul Haggis, adapting the book for the screen, jump back and forth between three narrative lines: a fictionalized James Bradley (Thomas McCarthy) interviewing the survivors and people connected to the event; the battle; and the ballyhoo, in all its marzipan-and-carved-ice excess. "Flags of Our Fathers" is an accomplished, stirring, but, all in all, rather strange movie. It has been framed as a search for the truth, yet there isn't much hidden material to expose. The flag-raising may have been a repeat performance, but it wasn't, apparently, staged for the camera. Bradley (Ryan Phillippe), Gagnon (Jesse Bradford), and Hayes (Adam Beach) were embarrassed by the opportunistic congressmen and the excitable girls who fawned over them, and Eastwood returns again and again to the chagrin of being praised for having done nothing special. When the men appear before a roaring crowd in a stadium, or attend a dress-up dinner filled with swells, they are suddenly yanked back in memory to a moment of terror on the island. Their anguish comes off as genuine, yet this was one occasion when the celebrity culture, however manic and tasteless, did some practical good. The movie has a fine, sensitive temper, but it lacks an emotional payoff. As the men fade into obscurity, it turns into an elegy.

The strength of "Flags" lies in its sombre battle scenes, which were shot mostly on a coastal strip of Iceland where the black sand has the same desolate look as Iwo Jima's mangled turf. Eastwood and the cinematographer Tom Stern drained all the color out of the shots except for thick, red stains of blood. There's quite a lot of that. In "Saving Private Ryan," Steven Spielberg told the story of a small unit fighting as a group in the countryside and in a ruined city, but Eastwood captures the isolation of a man standing quietly in the daylight who is suddenly torn up by mortar fire from far away. Death comes arbitrarily, without the phony "moral" distribution of rewards and punishments seen in many old war movies. A soldier just dies—or he doesn't. Of the three survivors, Ryan

Phillippe's Bradley is the sanest and also the bravest, Adam Beach's Hayes, a Pima Indian, the most emotional and battle-haunted. In a companion movie that will come out next year, "Letters from Iwo Jima," Eastwood will tell the story of the struggle from the Japanese point of view. The Americans expected to survive the battle; the Japanese were commanded to die in it. In "Flags," the mood is one of sober regret; in "Letters," one imagines, the mood could only be of the most ferocious devotion.

My friend Herbert was rude to his mother last spring, and, some time later, Mt. St. Helens erupted. And three girls I met on the Central Park carousel were kicked out of school for smoking, and the price of silver dropped by forty thousand rupiah in Indonesia. With these seemingly trivial events from my own life, I illustrate the dramatic principle by which the Mexican-born director Alejandro González Iñárritu makes his movies. Iñárritu, who made "Amores Perros" (2000), is one of the world's most gifted filmmakers. But I had the same reaction to "Babel" that I had to his most recent movie, "21 Grams" (2003): he creates savagely beautiful and heartbreaking images; he gets fearless performances out of his actors; he edits with the sharpest razor in any computer in Hollywood; and he abuses his audience with a humorless fatalism and a piling up of calamities that borders on the ludicrous.

"Babel" is set in Morocco, Tokyo, Southern California, and northern Mexico, and is made up of three stories held together only by the arbitrary will of the director and his collaborator, the screen-

writer Guillermo Arriaga. A Japanese hunter in Morocco, whose wife has committed suicide in Tokyo—devastating their teen-age daughter, who is deaf—leaves his rifle with a Moroccan guide, who sells it to a neighbor, a goatherd in the mountains. This man turns the gun over to his sons—young boys stupid enough to take a potshot at a tourist bus. Sleeping against a window, Cate Blanchett gets plugged through the neck, causing her almost to bleed to death until she is saved by the fervent ministrations of her husband, Brad Pitt, who, among other things, calls their home in San Diego and tells their housekeeper, Adriana Barraza, that she has to stay with their children. She obeys the instruction by carting the kids off with her to Mexico to attend her son's wedding, only to lose them in the desert on the way home. There are other mishaps and humiliations in this highbrow shaggy-dog-story-cum-travelogue that I will not trouble you with. No one is evil—the movie is not melodrama—and much of the physical action is decisively staged and shockingly powerful. "Babel" is an infuriatingly well-made disaster.

Arriaga and Iñárritu's theme is the pathos of ignorance. All over the world, terrible things happen, and we cannot know or feel them. We do not speak one another's language or share one another's customs, but an eagle-eyed artist, as he spans the globe, can link us together. As a mood, this globalized empathy is a noble enterprise. As a method of constructing a movie, it's very hard to pull off. The three stories share a common element in the relationship of parents to children, but they are so idiosyncratic

that they don't comment on one another; they just lie side by side in the same film. I don't think moviegoers are being overly categorical if they expect a sense of order sterner than trivial contingency. King Lear dies not because Goneril dropped a goblet two months earlier in her bedroom antechamber but because she, her sisters, the other characters, and the disintegrating natural world are part of an intricately worked pattern of will and action and event.

Arriaga and Iñárritu are trying to create potent fictions by harping on pain and misunderstanding. But why? Serendipity is every bit as likely as calamity. Happy chains of the miraculous exist in movie history—they are called screwball comedies, which is not a genre these filmmakers are likely to take up soon. Arriaga and Iñárritu, confusing sheer dread with dramatic tension, make us suffer, but in that case we had better learn something new, and I'm not sure there's much to be learned from watching Cate Blanchett scream as she's sewn up by a Moroccan village doctor except for the bourgeois lesson that wealthy Westerners should think twice before leaving the friendly confines of a comfortable hotel. It remains to be said that Brad Pitt gives a good performance as the distraught husband; the trials of the girl in Tokyo (Rinko Kikuchi), desperate for the embrace of a man, are carried off with the utmost boldness, delicacy, and understanding; and the entire movie looks magnificent—the neon nightscapes in Japan and the brownish mountain wastes of Morocco, too. Iñárritu has enough talent to shake up conventional moviemaking. But he still hasn't figured out how to use it. ♦

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Volume LXXXII, No. 35, October 30, 2006. The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: Jan. 23 & 30, Feb. 13 & 20, July 10 & 17, Aug. 7 & 14, Dec. 25 & Jan. 1) by The Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, executive director marketing & strategic planning; Janine Silvera, executive director of creative services; Jacqueline Cingula, director of integrated marketing; Steve Porter, creative director/advertising; Ellen Reid, creative services director; Edward Klaris, general counsel. Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president-human resources; John Buese, executive vice-president-chief information officer; David Orlin, senior vice-president-strategic sourcing; Robert Bennis, senior vice-president-real estate; Maurie Perl, senior vice-president-chief communications officer. Shared services provided by Advance Magazine Group: Steven T. Florio, Advance Magazine Group vice chairman; David B. Chemidlin, senior vice-president-general manager, shared services center. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R123242885. Canada Post return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

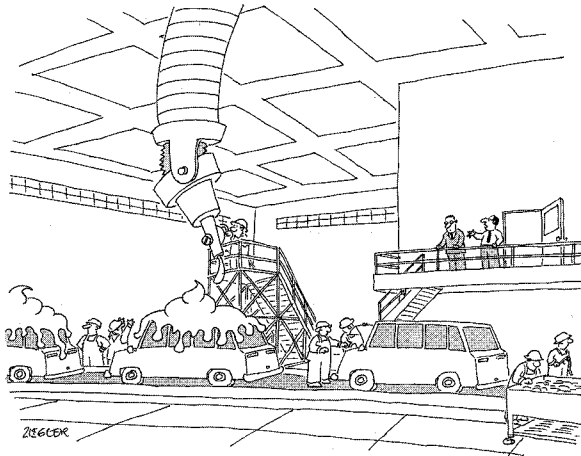
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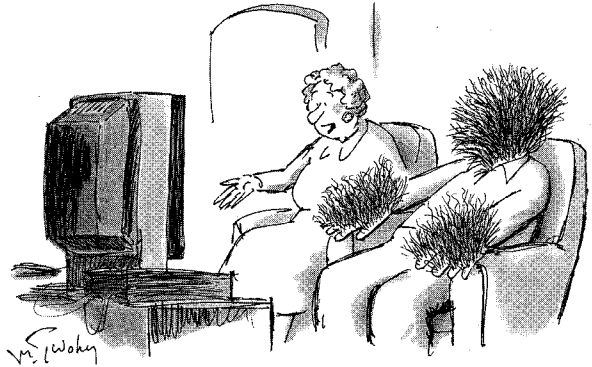
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, October 29th. Finalists in the October 16th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 13th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"It was a big seller until we had to recall the cherries."
Lou Storey, Long Branch, N.J.



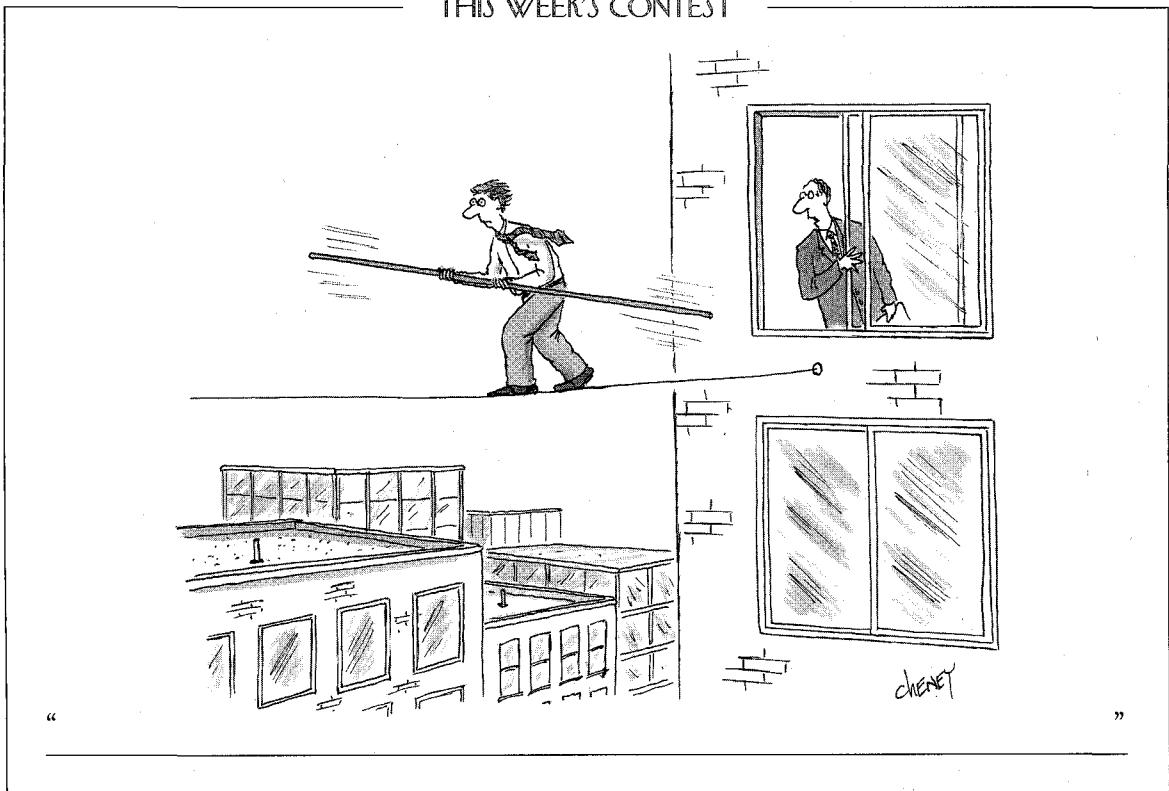
THE FINALISTS

"They do say results will vary."
Elizabeth Seeley, New Haven, Conn.

"That actor looks exactly like you!"
David Green, Fairfield, Conn.

*"I thought it sounded reputable.
He's also a member, for crying out loud!"*
Gabriel Fischer, Albany, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



LOC:
Exterior:

2001 Cabrio

Exterior: Cool White

Certified Pre-Loved Volkswagens



Interior: Black cloth

SPECIAL FEATURES:

- Knows San Diego like the back of its hood
- Filled mostly with premium gasoline
- Enjoyed many an outdoor music festival
- Taken to quickie wedding in Vegas
- Seen the sunset over the Pacific and Lake Tahoe
- Oil changed regularly
- Performed all scheduled maintenance
- Handwashed with old t-shirts
- Never parked in ultra-tight spots
- Once used in small town parade float
- Visited numerous pre and post modern gallery openings

All Certified Pre-Loved Volkswagens have been loved differently. And that's what makes them so special. While one may have crisscrossed Canada, another may have only seen the back roads of Georgia. In fact, the only thing they all share is the Certified Pre-Loved 2-year/24,000 mile limited warranty. This covers engine, engine management system, transmission, steering system, electrical system, suspension, drivetrain, audio and alarm systems, anti-lock braking system, heating and air conditioning and safety systems. The Volkswagen Certified Pre-Loved Limited Warranty is for 2 years or 24,000 miles, whichever comes first. But we have a feeling it'll be the 24,000 miles.

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BG-GW (07/06)

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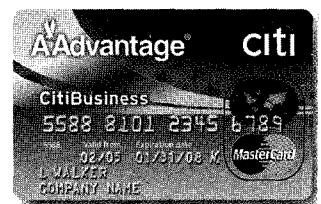


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